This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

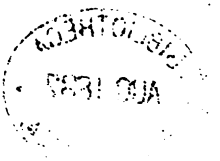
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

THE POWER OF AN ENDLESS LIFE,

AND

OTHER SERMONS.



THE

POWER OF AN ENDLESS LIFE,

AND

OTHER SERMONS.

BY THE LATE

REV. JAMES MOIR, M.A.,

MAYBOLE.

WITH A BRIEF MEMOIR.

BIBLIOTHECA
AUG 1882
BODLEIANA

London:

HODDER AND STOUGHTON,

27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

MDCCCLXXXII.

100. bb. 168.

Hazell, Watson, and Viney, Printers, London and Aylesbury.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

PREFACE ix

MEMOIR xiii

SERMONS.

I. THE POWER OF AN ENDLESS LIFE 1

"Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life."—HEB. vii. 16.

II. THE RICHES OF GOD 20

"God, who is rich in mercy."—EPH. ii. 4

III. THE CHRISTIAN'S ESTIMATE OF LIFE AND DEATH . 30

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—PHIL. i. 21.

IV. THE TERCENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF JOHN KNOX . 41

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."—PS. cxvi. 15.

V. THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TRUE PROGRESS . 56

"I press toward the mark."—PHIL. iii. 14.

VI. THE WIDOW'S MITE. 66

"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury; and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."—MARK xii. 41, 44.

VII. IT IS FINISHED 77

"It is finished."—John xix. 30.

VIII. THE RECOGNITION OF PROVIDENCE . . . 89

"Look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door; is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?"—2 KINGS vi. 32.

IX. THE PRECIOUSNESS OF GOD'S WORD . . . 102

"The word of the Lord was precious in those days."—1 SAM. iii. 1.

X. THE BELIEVER'S COMPANIONS 118

"I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts."—Ps. cxix. 63.

XI. THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES 131

"*How* is it that ye do not discern this time?"—LUKE xii. 56.

LECTURES.

I. JACOB'S DREAM 150

"And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran; and he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night," etc.—GEN. xxviii. 10—22.

II. JOSEPH DISCOVERS HIMSELF TO HIS BRETHREN . 166

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood before him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren," etc.—GEN. xlv.

III. THE WIDOW OF NAIN'S SON 183

"And it came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people," etc.—LUKE vii. 11—17.

PREFACE.

THE selection of sermons, for this volume, has been made strictly with a view to meet the wishes of friends to have a memorial of one whom they loved. In the huge mass of manuscripts left by Mr. Moir, there is much that might prove no mean contribution to our theological and exegetical literature. But, in such a work as this, it has been deemed advisable to confine the selection to a few from among what may be considered as the more practical discourses. It was in the preaching of such that he had the greatest personal satisfaction, and we know that it is in connection with sermons of this class that he desired to live in the memory of his friends. The sermon that gives the name to this volume strikes the key-note of his ministry.

It is but just to add that these sermons were not written by Mr. Moir with prospect of publication. And, as the manuscript was seldom used in the pulpit, his friends will miss, not only the voice of the preacher, but also some of those burning thoughts, with which, frequently, the feelings of the moment found expression.

All that has been attempted in the brief memoir, published along with these sermons, has been, while the impression is vivid, to endeavour to catch and retain, in brief outline, a sketch to place in the hands of friends. And if in this we seem to have looked through somewhat partial eyes, it may be none the less true, and none the less appreciated.

A. H. M.

MEMOIR.

JAMES MOIR was born on the 5th of March, 1829, in the town of Huntly, in the Strathbogie district of Aberdeenshire. At a very early age he removed, along with his parents, to Aberdeen; where, with but few interruptions, he continued until his settlement in Maybole. His early life was spent amid the stirring times of "the ten years' conflict;" and, throughout the whole period of his youth, he had the unspeakable privilege of sitting at the feet of that Gamaliel-like preacher and teacher, the late Rev. Dr. Alexander D. Davidson, of the Free West Church, Aberdeen. These with other influences, of a religious and educational kind, moulded his character, and mapped out for him his life-plan. Among the companions of his early days were youths of a kindred spirit; deeply religious, passionately studious, and earnestly ambitious to fit themselves for positions of beneficial influence in life; and several of them, like the late Rev. W. Wilson, of Musselburgh, became his chosen friends of later days. Material of that kind came fittingly to the hands of such a man as their respected teacher, Dr. James Melvin, of the Aberdeen Grammar School; and, to the end of his days, James Moir retained

towards that prince of Latinists, feelings of reverence akin to those that every educated youth has for the great sages of the past. At the competition for "bursaries" at King's College he took a good place. It had been his intention to spend another year in preparatory study before entering on his "arts" curriculum; but, emboldened by his success, and with the approval of Dr. Melvin, he at once entered upon his college course. And, while by delay he would certainly have obtained a higher place, he continued to maintain to the last the good position he had gained. His fellow-students anticipated that at the end of the curriculum he would have gained the highest mathematical honours, but feeble health compelled him to withdraw from the final examinations.

His studies were not restricted to the prescribed "arts" or undergraduate course. Science and general literature engaged much of his attention. Astronomy, Geology, and Chemistry were his favourite studies in Science; and in general literature he cultivated a wide and critical acquaintance with all our best English Classics. In his early years he was the friend and correspondent of leading men in both these fields.

During his student days, the Mechanics' Institute of Aberdeen was formed, and in this he took a very lively and active interest. He taught classes there in English literature, elocution, and mathematics, and delivered lectures which created considerable interest, and brought him into the forefront at a very early period of his life.

His divinity studies were pursued partly in Aberdeen and partly in Edinburgh; but, owing to feeble health, were interrupted by a lengthened residence in London and a visit to the Continent. In after-life, when referring to his studies in Divinity, he frequently alluded, in grateful terms, to the good he got from the "clear and massive" teaching of the

late Rev. Dr. McLagan, of the Aberdeen Free Church College. He was licensed to preach the Gospel in the summer of 1853, by the Free Presbytery of Aberdeen; and, after preaching, with great acceptance, for three months in the Free Gilcomston Church there, he was appointed assistant to the Rev. Dr. A. S. Patterson, of Hutchesontown, Glasgow. In Dr. Patterson he found a true and life-long friend. Their scholarly tastes and sympathies were alike; and, down to the very close of his ministry (for the aged Doctor survives him), he had no higher pleasure than in occasional re-unions with one whose ripe Christian experience and rich attainments made him as valuable as he was a fast and loving friend. That feeling was reciprocated by the worthy Doctor, who, writing recently, says, "To experience the overflowing kindness of his truly hospitable home—to mark his hearty sympathy with my interest in historical remains and picturesque localities on the Carrick shore and among the Carrick hills—and to hear the Gospel so forcibly and faithfully proclaimed by my beloved friend, have been among the luxuries of my life."

In December, 1854, Mr. Moir was ordained to the pastoral charge of the Free Church of Maybole, to which he was introduced by Dr. Patterson. Here he continued to labour, notwithstanding frequent pressing applications from friends elsewhere to leave it, down to the close of his life. Soon after his settlement he married Mary Brown, daughter of the late William Brown, of Corfin. In her he found a true helpmate; one who, by her quiet and unostentatious piety, cheered and encouraged him in all his work. She predeceased him by nearly three years; and they are both survived by two sons.

Between Mr. Brown and Mr. Moir a warm personal attachment was formed from the first, which ripened into

the most intimate friendship. Not only from his social position, but also because of his consistent Christian character and large-hearted liberality, Mr. Brown had, for years, exercised a beneficial influence in a wide district around Maybole. Doubtless this may have indirectly assisted to prepare the way for that singularly unsectarian influence which Mr. Moir, so soon after his settlement, began to exercise in the district, and continued to the end to maintain.

We have, in general outline, traced his career up to his settlement in Maybole, and the rest of his life may be best brought before us, briefly, by glancing at a few outstanding characteristics of the man and his manifold labours.

At the foundation of all Mr. Moir's worth lay the fact that he was truly a man of God. From earliest days he was a child of grace. He was never very communicative regarding his own personal experiences. But Christianity was with him no secondary matter. It was not merely *one* of the things of his life, it was *the one* thing. *It was his life*, and all else was but tributary to this the main stream. Christ was his guiding-star, and to be like Christ the one desire of his heart. And if his Christianity was wanting in some of the narrownesses and prejudices that have been associated by some with the name of Christ, it was to that extent liker the Master whom he loved and served. His piety was deep, true, and enlightened, making him cautious and charitable in his judgment of others, and wise and discriminating in his dealings with different types and classes of men. He combined, in large degree, the best and strongest elements of Christian character; and was eminently fitted to mould and direct the diverse types of intellectual and spiritual life of which a congregation is composed. At various times his spiritual life received fresh impulses and enlargement. Particularly was this the case during the religious awaken-

ing that stirred our whole nation in 1874-5. Writing then to the author of this memoir, when on the eve of visiting him, he said, "You will find me a new man." And so it was, and so everybody felt it to be; for, deep and true as the current of his religious life was before, it deepened and widened then.

As might be expected, in one of such experience, the main object of his ministry was to win souls to Christ; to overcome men's prejudices against the Gospel, and to awaken within them longings for something nobler and higher than a mere worldly existence. And to this end he preached the Gospel, in all its varied richness and fulness. In doctrine he was strongly, and even *narrowly*, evangelical. He was conservative, to the last degree, of the great fundamentals of evangelical doctrine. Yet he could not, in the common acceptation of that term, be called a doctrinal preacher. Doctrine was the foundation of his preaching, and was interwoven with all his sermons. But his main aim seems to have been to hold up a *living Christ*, as the embodiment of all evangelical truth, and through the loveliness of Christ to woo and win men from self and sensualism. Of deliberate purpose he preached nothing but Christ. More than most men, he could have made his pulpit a platform from which to exhibit a wide and varied culture; but that was a temptation to which he never yielded. The richness of his mind gave an interest accompanied by depth and dignity to all his ministrations, that betokened the scholar as well as the Christian. Science, literature, and art contributed to the elucidation of his theme; but all were made subservient to preaching Christ.

The evangelical pulpit has sometimes been charged with narrowness, and the round of its teaching is supposed to be a mere repetition of commonplaces. Such a charge

cannot be laid against it as represented by men like James Moir. There was an individuality that prevented him from being a mere echo of others, however good. And this, coupled with wide culture and wonderful versatility of mind, gave an interest and uniqueness even to his evangelistic addresses and sermons. His main endeavour, in the pulpit, was to lay evangelical truth alongside of practical life, to look at it, not merely from the standpoint of a theologian, but also from that of a shrewd and practical observer of men. He had a keen insight into *men;* could appreciate their strong and their weak points, and knew their prejudices and their difficulties. And with unswerving faithfulness, combined with kindly charity, he so adapted his preaching to the immediate surroundings as to awaken interest, overcome prejudice, and evoke sympathy with the truth.

In distinctively evangelistic work, in which he took a keen and active interest, Mr. Moir may have confined himself to a limited circle of doctrine; but his usual Sabbath ministrations took a wide range. No one could have judged beforehand as to how he would have treated any given text in his own pulpit. That the sermon would be textual, evangelical, and practical, every hearer knew; but he was so far removed from mere conventionality, that they could only be sure that the discourse would be strikingly original and practically applicable. He was a student, but he was no mere copyist. He was a *living man* of wide sympathies, who so keenly observed and appreciated his immediate surroundings, that he regulated and adapted his teachings to the passing moods and feelings of his people and of the times. What was moving men's minds was affecting his; and in some respects his preaching was like the performance of a skilful player upon the harp, who knows exactly what chords to touch. His aim being in the feelings evoked and con-

victions produced, to lift the hearts of his hearers to God in Christ. During the week he visited and associated with his people, sympathizing with all that was affecting and interesting them, and then on the Sunday he strove to import suitable Christian truth into their hearts, as God's ambassador with God's message to their souls. In his later student days he frequently remarked to his mother, "Woe to me if I preach not the Gospel!" and to the end this was his motto.

We have said that his teachings took a wide range. He believed in the good old Scottish practice of consecutive exposition of the Bible, in the form of lectures. And in the course of his ministry he expounded a large number of books, both in the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, it was here that his forte seemed to lie, and many of his flock have warm and sacred memories of some of those courses of Biblical exposition. And well they might, for his manuscripts give evidence of hard reading and earnest thought lying behind all his lectures. Among these lectures, many look back with pleasure upon the luxury it was to listen to the course on Genesis. When they were finished, he was asked to publish selections from them, but declined, stating that he should like to revise them before publication, and that he had no time for the research and reading which his partial study had convinced him were requisite.

But something must be said as to the style of his preaching. Referring to this feature, the Rev. R. Lawson, of the Established West Church, Maybole, in a sermon preached on the Sabbath after Mr. Moir's death, said: "As to his style of preaching, his own words applied to his friend, the late Mr. Wilson, of Musselburgh, might well be applied to himself. As a preacher, he reminded one more of what may be met with among the superior divines of the English Church than in our own Scotch

Presbyterian pulpits. The *ingenium perfervidum Scotorum*, so dear to the national taste in preaching, was not in his way. All was calm, elegant, quietly earnest, but yet with an impressiveness more arresting and penetrating, perhaps, than what is achieved by noisier and more demonstrative preachers, who, as Vinet puts it, 'seem to confound *in*spiration with *per*spiration.' With the change of names," Mr. Lawson adds, "these words used by Mr. Moir, as descriptive of his most intimate friend, may well be used as, in great part, descriptive of himself." When a young man residing in London, he was pressed by friends associated with the then Bishop of London to enter the English Church, because they believed he was suited for that pulpit. But his Presbyterianism was too decided for his taking such a step, and he was too true to his principles to sacrifice his convictions to the mere prospect of preferment. Naturally gifted with a fine voice, he had so trained it by his elocutionary studies, in early life, that, without the slightest effort, his readings and preaching were made attractive. His powers as an elocutionist were of the most refined type. A somewhat singular testimony was offered to this by an eminent teacher in London, who pressed him to make tragedy his study and life-work. During the latter years of his ministry, this feature in his preaching was not perhaps so markedly present; but in his earlier days it attracted wide attention, and had him in request for special sermons. But his repugnance to bustle and popularity made him disinclined to follow up these occasions.

In an obituary notice in the *Christian World*, evidently from the pen of a friend and companion of his student days, we find the following: "For twenty-seven years he had been the devoted pastor of the congregation which gave him his first call. His clear intellect, and the singularly graceful and impressive eloquence by which he was distinguished

when quite a young man, suggest that he could have become one of the most celebrated preachers of his time; but a delicacy of feeling, perhaps too sensitive, and a lack of every form of ambition, prevented him from making his power known as widely as it might have been. To serve his Master by assiduous cultivation of his own corner of the vineyard, and to be the delight of a few friends who knew his worth, and humour, and abounding geniality, contented him. Perhaps he chose the better as well as the happier part, but some of his old friends almost grudge to Maybole the monopoly of so finely touched a spirit as that of James Moir."

Referring to his pulpit powers, as well as to some other features, Dr. Peter Bayne, who was an early friend and class-fellow, writes in a letter to the surviving members of the family: "No man have I known who was more sincere in his religion, or less gloomy in his devoutness. When I reflect on the brilliancy of his youth, I find something almost to wonder at in the perfect quiet, the contented serenity, the happy peacefulness of his life. I heard little of him in the pulpit, but quite enough to convince me that he might have been one of the leading popular preachers in Edinburgh or Glasgow, if he had pleased. His fervour, his originality, his chastened but expressive and penetrating eloquence, made an impression on me that has remained vivid for five and twenty years. I cannot think, without a kind of grudge, of Maybole having monopolized such a man. But his life was usefully and honourably spent, and perhaps he did well to shun the noise and fuss of a great popular reputation."

His work in Maybole called into play some of the finest features of his character, and pre-eminently his cautious prudence and shrewd common sense. The waves of religious awakenings that have passed over this country during the

past twenty-five years have affected Maybole as deeply as any part of Scotland. The movement of 1859 assumed a form there that called for a combination of the strongest and tenderest elements of Christian character in those who were the leaders of the people. Physical prostrations were taking place nightly, ignorant enthusiasts believing in dreams and visions, while many looked upon these as almost essential to conversion. It was a trying time, calling for a firm but kindly hand. Most men would have turned away from it as mere fanaticism. He was too wise and earnest for that. Shall a religious awakening move a community, and its religious guides keep aloof? Surely not! James Moir felt that, and threw himself into the work, endeavouring to restrain abuses, and guide into a proper and practical channel all that was true and good. It was the experience of that trying time that made him cautious and careful in all after-movements. In connection with the "physical prostrations" he preached a sermon, which, at the urgent request of many valued friends, was at once published. It created no little discussion. In one of the religious papers of the time it was criticised as the work of one who must have been an opponent of the movement; but he never troubled to answer that, and he did not require, for the sermon itself was the best refutation of such a misrepresentation. It is marked by the greatest prudence, and while strongly warning people against looking for and relying on physical prostration, he does not fail to note that even this, which he denounced as an evil, and in no way traceable to the Spirit of God, was being overruled for arresting the attention of a wicked world. An incident of that time, and which illustrates his real connection with this movement, is worthy of being recalled. A gentleman who was taking a prominent part in recording and guiding the religious awakening of the period, visited Maybole, to see for himself the work that had been attract-

ing so much notice. He reached the United Presbyterian Church, where the meeting that evening was being held, after the commencement of the service Mr. Moir was presiding. At the close the stranger introduced himself, and they walked together from the church, talking over the one engrossing theme of the day. "And what a sad pity," said this stranger, "that the Free Church minister has been opposing this work!" Those who knew the rich fund of humour possessed by James Moir can understand how thoroughly he would appreciate such a situation. Yet he said nothing by way of explanation until parting, when he simply told him who he was; and from that moment they were friends.

His Sabbath-school work, and interest in the young generally, call for special attention. He was a true friend of the young, ever interesting himself in their welfare and progress, helping them by his advice and counsel, and in many other ways. Few ministers knew so much about the individual daily life of his entire flock; and as the children grew up around him, he became their trusted counsellor, and took a sincere interest in them all. Those who left Maybole were not forgotten. He was the superintendent of his own Sabbath school, and took a personal interest in all departments of Sabbath-school work. The school became under his care very large, thoroughly equipped, and efficiently wrought. The bulk of the teachers were trained under his own eye; for he liked to keep the link of connection unbroken, and to draft the young people from the Bible-classes into the teaching staff. Indeed, in the course of years, they became so linked together, that the Sabbath, school was like a large family. And this family feeling that pervaded the whole impressed itself very deeply upon occasional visitors. The service of song, too, formed a prominent feature, and one in which he took a loving, kindly,

and guiding oversight. By the well-trained "Sabbath-school choir" the services both of church and school were enlivened with rich and hearty singing. In the pulpit, as well as in the school, the interests of the little ones of the flock were consulted. He had them always in view. Intense solemnity characterized the worship both of church and school. But they were solemn without being morose, and such a lively cheerfulness pervaded the whole, as was fitted to win the sympathies of the children. They were seldom wearied by services that were either protracted or dull. The extraordinary efforts put forth by him to make their Sabbath school annual social meeting thoroughly enjoyable and beneficial will be amongst the loving recollections of Maybole for many years to come. In a word, he took a fatherly interest in them all; and we can safely reckon that a large proportion of those who were savingly moved in times of blessing, received their first impressions in the earnest appeals made to them when children.

Nor was his work confined either to his own congregation or to his distinctively ministerial functions. He was a frequent lecturer, drawing largely upon his scientific knowledge, and sparing no expense to illustrate his subjects and interest the people by diagrams and lantern illustrations. He was ever ready to do his best to help in everything likely to contribute to the enlightenment, enjoyment, and welfare of the community. In these efforts, although he held to well-defined lines, he was able to avoid discussions and parties. He was known to hold decided views on political and social questions, but could not be called a party man. He held firmly his own opinions; but he never obtruded them upon others. And he never allowed denominational or class considerations to interfere with his judgment upon, or treatment of, social problems.

Justice to this side of Mr. Moir's life requires that promi-

nence be given to one or two points. He took a wide interest in the general welfare of the town, helping the distressed, relieving the necessitous, and encouraging the industrious. When, about 1858-9, a great depression took place in hand-loom weaving, which was then the staple trade of the town, he saw that a revival in that trade was not to be looked for, and set himself to find out what was best to be done to relieve the immediate distress, and to provide against future emergencies. Having satisfied himself that many could not earn a comfortable sustenance at home, he set about collecting funds, and planned and carried out a large emigration to New Zealand. This demanded considerable sacrifice on his part, for a great proportion of the emigrants went from his own congregation. But he never grudged the serious diminution of his flock; and, in after years, often referred to it as having been most beneficial both for the emigrants themselves and the interests of Maybole.

Further, he was an educationalist, in the enlightened sense of that word, and took an active share in all educational matters. Prior to the passing of the present Education Act, there was a female school connected with the Free Church. To look after that, and also a ragged school, which was supported for many years by his respected father-in-law, were works to his mind; and to his careful oversight and kindly encouragement were largely due the efficiency of the schools and the very high place which the female school occupied in the Government returns. On the passing of the new Act, he was elected a member of the School Board. There he had special pleasure in helping to conjoin divergent interests, and assisting in the establishment of a large and most efficient Board School, into which all the denominational schools were absorbed.

In connection with the social side of Mr. Moir's life, it

will be necessary to refer to his humour, geniality, and kindly hospitality. No more hospitable home could be found than the Maybole Free Manse, and his unique position drew round his board a large and varied circle of friends. At these social gatherings he gave full play to a genial humour, which was a gift that he sanctified to his Master's use. There was a quiet sunshine about him that gave pleasure in his company, and at gatherings of his friends his wit and humour kept them interested and amused. His wit was never at a loss, and never to be taken by surprise, and stood him in good part when visiting among the Irish who resided in the neighbourhood, or dealing with clever scoffers. His appreciation of nature's beauties, and his linguistic and antiquarian attainments, made him a travelling companion rarely to be met with. And yet withal his humour, however amusing to his friends, was never boisterous in himself. As Dr. Patterson writes, "His conversation always abounded in shrewd remarks and quiet dignity." And even when he unbent most, that quiet and easy dignity never forsook him. We have said that he sanctified this gift to his Master's use; and it was sought for by friends who knew with what deliberate purpose he used it when necessary to throw oil upon the troubled waters. Then he disarmed opposition, and dispelled clouds of bitterness by sallies of humour. Yet the lash of his wit could, when necessary, be brought to bear, with withering effect, upon sham and hypocrisy. His fellow-townsman, the Rev. R. Lawson, in the sermon already referred to, says in relation to these characteristics: "I do not need to say that all my intercourse with Mr. Moir (for the long period of eighteen years now) was of the friendliest character. We never had a quarrel, nor even an approach to one. But this is not saying much, for the difficulty was not how to get on with Mr. Moir, but how to quarrel with him. He was pre-

eminently a man of peace, a man whose whole life preached a sermon on those words of St. Paul, 'Let brotherly love continue.' He was a man of wide reading, and of fine taste. His lectures here were always given in the happiest style, and his private conversation was even better than his public appearances. In fact, I do not know any one who could be more genial and pleasant at his own fireside, who could look more kindly on the failings of a friend, or throw the mantle of charity more gracefully over his mistakes. And now he has passed away, a man whose place it will be very difficult to fill. Other preachers will come and fill his pulpit, and Mr. Moir's name will gradually pass out of men's thoughts; but when disputes arise, and the beginnings of that strife which are as the letting out of waters, there will be more than one who will recall the genial presence which was ever on the side of peace, and sigh in their hearts for 'the sound of a voice that is still.' To myself the loss is as that of a near friend. We belonged to different denominations, but he never made me feel that. We, in fact, belonged to the *same church* in reality, and looked at the great matters of life and eternity in much the same way. In many labours in this town we stood side by side, as now I like to remember. We differed, of course, sometimes, but differences with him were never unpleasant; for he was always the gentleman, and had nothing harsh or bitter about his nature."

In the midst of such manifold labours, ministerial and social, very little time was left for his favourite studies. Yet he managed to keep himself abreast of the times, in all departments, as his well-filled and well-used library fully attested. The want of time for general study was always a matter of deep regret to him. Writing to Dr. Patterson in 1868, he says: "What a hurry-scurry life has become in these days! I have read in the biographies of the ministers

of former days of the quiet leisure they often enjoyed for maturing their minds by reading and meditation, and of the delightful reunions with brethren that they had, from time to time, stimulating and improving their literary and scientific tastes. But one hears very little of that sort of thing now. I know for myself (and I suppose I differ very little from others in this particular) my life is, in the highest degree, inimical to all solid progress in study of any kind. I look at my books as a hungry man may be supposed to look at a feast through an iron grating, but which he cannot touch."

Although he writes thus, he was a great reader, and in one of his manuscripts there are recorded the titles of fifty-seven treatises in various languages which he had carefully studied before he began to write, and on other subjects it may be safely said that his reading was far beyond the range of his close and laborious ministerial studies. Dr. Patterson says of him: "In the course of my visits to Maybole I found that his attainments in Theology were accompanied with considerable scientific knowledge and a keen appreciation of literary excellence. It was, however, to his ministerial work that he mainly devoted his distinguished talents." And so it was; for although frequently solicited to take part in literary work of various kinds, he declined, and concentrated all his energies upon his congregational and kindred duties.

In Theology, at an early period of life, he espoused pre-millenarianism. He had, however, nothing in common with the extreme and sensational views that have sometimes been associated with it, but he held firmly to the belief in the pre-millennial advent of Christ. To him the redemption of our world in the fullest sense, the world upon which we tread, as well as its inhabitants, was a prime article of faith. And as he looked for a partial fulfilment of that in the

resurrection of men's bodies, so he looked for its complete fulfilment in the redemption of our whole earth as man's final home. To him, Christ's pre-millennial advent and personal reign were part of the Gospel plan. Several of his sermons, upon this subject, were printed at the request of friends, and some years ago he published a small book on "The Seven Churches of Asia." At the time its literary and critical merits were very highly praised by some eminent men, even while they differed from some of its conclusions. And a request has been made recently to have it re-issued. For many years he was engaged upon a work in which he set himself to treat the whole subject, historically, doctrinally, and prophetically; but he was only able to partially write out the results of his researches on the first division of the subject. When, some months before his death, his medical advisers insisted upon his partial retirement from pulpit work, and that he should have a colleague, the prospect of leisure and quiet for this and other literary work reconciled him to the idea.

His lively hope in the coming Christ gave brightness to his own Christian experience, and was a cheering and stimulating force amid all the trials and strains of his life-work. It was with him no mere sentiment, but a practical power that found an outlet in earnest appeals to sinners, as well as in loving encouragement to saints. Many friends differed from him, but there was no dogmatism on his part when he dealt with the subject, and his intellectual and spiritual force always awakened interest whenever he spoke on this theme.

But we must now turn to the closing scenes. December of 1879 saw the completion of twenty-five years' ministry in Maybole, and his loving people and fellow-townsmen resolved to celebrate the event by the presentation of a substantial token of their esteem. In a short time a considerable

fund was raised, and, at a social meeting held on the 14th of January, 1880, the presentation was made. Frequently before then occasions had been taken to offer him similar expressions of regard. It then seemed within the bounds of probability, when his friends expressed the hope, that twenty-five years afterwards he and his congregation would meet again to celebrate his jubilee. But in less than six months thereafter the beginning of the end came.

About June he began to suffer from what was then believed to be a rheumatic affection in the shoulder. Serious symptoms developing in the autumn, he consulted the best medical practitioners in Edinburgh. Considerable difficulty was experienced in defining the cause of his failing health and strength; but, as time went on, it became apparent that he was suffering from a tumour, situated in the posterior part of the chest.

During his illness he was much comforted by the kind help, in congregational work, given by his friend and neighbour, the Rev. Mr. Arbuckle, of Kirkoswald. Referring to that time, Mr. Arbuckle writes: "Deeply interested in the welfare of his flock, and anxious that they should not even temporarily suffer from his inability, he was greatly exercised in getting arrangements made whereby the work of the congregation might be efficiently carried on until such time as a colleague and successor could be appointed. At his urgent solicitation the congregation were requested to make a large addition to the staff of office-bearers. He rejoiced greatly in the result, which promised an increase of working power which would enable his successor to carry forward more effectively the work of the Lord among them. The last public duty he discharged was at the ordination of these elders and deacons. His heart was greatly set on taking part in this ceremony. It was a source of much satisfaction that he was able, even in much weakness, to

preside on that occasion. He felt as if it would be his last public act in the presence of his people, and it proved to be his last public appearance. It took place at the close of the fast-day service in October. His people were deeply solemnized, and the impression made will never be effaced from their memories."

After that the malady made rapid progress, and he suffered intense agony, but bore it all with exemplary patience and Christian resignation. He was perfectly aware of what was before him, and contemplated the future with calmness. Death did not take him by surprise, and although he was willing to remain and to devote himself more than he had ever done to preach a "*full* Gospel," as he stated it to a relative, he was willing to depart and be with Christ. So long as possible he was taken out for a little walk daily; and it was touching, on some of these last days, to see how he was approached by all classes, and the reverent consideration manifested towards him. When failing strength indicated that the end was very near, he made all the arrangements, as was his wont, about congregational and home matters, even to those for his funeral. It was like one preparing for a journey. In the days of his health he was the most methodical of men, drawing out his plans for each day; and, when going on a journey, sketching out a programme of the whole, down to the minutest details. Now, when about to make his last journey, he prepares everything with characteristic minuteness, as well as with perfect composure. On the day before his death he asked for his brother-in-law, to say good-bye to him, and later sent parting messages by telegraph to his brothers. He knew whither he was journeying, and the light of the better land was shining around him. Only once did the strong man appear to falter, and even then there was strength amid weakness. In a paroxysm of acute pain he said, "Oh that the Lord had given me

less strength! for then the battle would have been shorter." During his last days his favourite portions of Scripture were the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel, the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, the closing chapter of Revelation, and the twenty-third Psalm. These he dwelt upon with great delight, and towards the end he delighted in our beautiful hymn—

> "The hour of my departure's come;
> I hear the voice that calls me home:
> At last, O Lord! let trouble cease,
> And let Thy servant die in peace."

To one of his elders, who saw him a few days before he died, he said, "I am going *over yonder* now. It is not far. It is but a very short way, *just over there*." On the afternoon before his death, he said, "If this is what you call dying, let me tell you it is a very simple and very easy thing indeed; so easy, that I could willingly die over again." He retained consciousness to the last, and as light began to dawn on the 6th of May, 1881, he was heard say, "Come, Lord Jesus! come quickly!" soon after, at 5.30, he literally fell asleep in Jesus.

Thus, at the comparatively early age of fifty-two, passed away one who had done noble service for Christ in his day and generation. So calm was his end, that his friends could scarcely realize that death took him, and mingled joy with their sorrow. Our loss is his gain; and as the recollection of his Christ-like life and triumphant death form pleasing memories to all his friends, so they form rich jewels in his crown of rejoicing to-day. His funeral took place on Wednesday, the 10th of May, and was largely attended by his congregation, fellow-townsmen, and friends from considerable distances; and, on the following Sabbath, his funeral sermon was preached by his friend, the Rev. Mr. Fergusson, of Barr.

Dr. Patterson writes: "I have been with him when sickness had invaded his dwelling, and beautiful it was to see with what sedate, yet kindly care he watched over his venerable father-in-law, and over his amiable and excellent wife, in the time of their distress. That he bore the sufferings of his own last illness with such fortitude and resignation, was characteristic of the manly and pious sufferer. How soothing to believe that his sufferings are ended, and that all is well with the loved one we have lost!"

"Until the day break, and the shadows flee away."

"No worn-out summer wind expires to rest more gently,
Than a good man to his repose."

SERMONS.

I.

THE POWER OF AN ENDLESS LIFE.

"Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life."—HEB. vii. 16.

MY discourse will be founded on just one expression, but a very remarkable one, used by the Apostle in this passage, namely, "The power of an endless life;" and I shall not bind myself to the application of it which the Apostle is employing in his argument here. The expression might find an appropriate place in a thousand other arguments, and I mean to take it in its fullest and most unrestricted sense, "The power of an endless life."

The love of life, and the accompanying desire for its continuance, are perhaps more deeply implanted in the human breast than anything else that can be named. Death, when coupled with the idea of the utter extinction of our conscious being—death, *i.e.*, amounting to annihilation—is what we shrink from with the extremest horror and aversion. It is of such a death that the great dramatist says,—

> "'Tis too horrible!
> The weariest and most loathed worldly life,
> That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment,
> Can lay on nature, is a paradise
> To what we fear of death."

But this "longing after immortality" does not begin to

show itself very decidedly until we find ourselves to be considerably advanced in the journey of life. In early youth we seem to have such wealth of years on hand, that we hardly, for a moment, suspect that we shall not have enough to accomplish all the high enterprises that float in gorgeous perspective before our untutored fancy. We then "take no note of time," unless, perhaps, it be to chide it for its tardiness. And so long and so secure appears to be our possession of *this* life, that we secretly assume it to be at least premature to be giving ourselves any great anxiety about a life beyond. But the delusions regarding human life, which are incidental to the young, and which made our early days so careless and happy, cannot cling to us always. And if young people live to approach, and more especially to overpass, the confines of middle life, they will discover that their views of time have undergone a striking change, and that they can now accord their heartiest assent to that saying of Paul, which once may have appeared to them to have been both unthankful and uncalled for: "This I say, brethren, *the time is short*" (1 Cor. vii. 29). It is then that the desire of an endless life seriously begins to stir in us, and we seize on the very thought of it with all the eagerness of a drowning man catching at the life-buoy. It is then becoming plain to us that life will be done before we have accomplished any appreciable part of all that we imagined to do, and that we will inevitably be huddled out of it with a sickening sense of incompleteness oppressing us. In nearly all the great picture galleries there are to be seen unfinished pictures of some of the great masters—the hastiest and meagrest outlines, with just here and there some little details approaching completion. And no better are the lives of the most eminent and most industrious of God's saints now. Their virtues are but in outline. Their programme of life-work is barely yet begun. Everything

about them is, as Paul expresses it, only "*in part.*" They know in part, and prophesy in part (1 Cor. xiii. 9). But will that which is in part never be done away? Will these disjointed fragments of our aspirations and our endeavours never be gathered up and be united in one harmonious whole? Will that which is perfect never come? (1 Cor. xiii. 10.)—Must we go down to the grave, and never be found again to collect these broken and scattered threads, and to resume the pattern we had just begun to weave? We fondly hope that this life is not the be all and the end all of us, and that it is only an earnest and foretaste of an eternal life to come, when an endless pathway of even and solid advancement will open up before us. And such a hope we can show to be no delusion, but the grandest and most heart-stirring verity that has ever been revealed to man.

In meditating for a little upon this text, I shall endeavour to show, I. That there is an endless life; II. The manner in which we may become possessors of it; and III. What ought to be the *power* of this endless life.

I. In the *first* place, then, I assert that there is an "*endless life.*"

The human reason, as exhibited in the noblest and most gifted men of our race, has in every age, and apart from any Divine revelation, tried to persuade itself that there is an immortality to be inherited beyond this present existence. But the kind of evidence on which reason has built this belief cannot be accepted as amounting to absolute demonstration, and such as to preclude all possibility of doubt or cavil. It is at best but of the nature of presumptive evidence, carrying with it no doubt a high degree of probability, and especially when we gather all up, and subject ourselves to its cumulative force; but still it leaves a void, a gulf unbridged. Even the minds most conversant with

speculations of that sort, such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and the other great lights of the old Pagan world, failed to be entirely satisfied with them; and, when they came to die, it was after all no better than a plunge in the dark.

The kind of evidence on which reason relies for proving a future state of immortality is such as the following:— There is, at the outset, the essential difference between intelligence and all the known properties of matter. It is surely not matter which is conscious, and thinks, and reasons; and the falling to pieces, therefore, of our gross material bodies is no evidence that the conscious and intelligent principle within us has suffered any damage, or has in any way demitted its functions. And then there is the high improbability that an infinitely wise and benevolent Creator would fashion a creature of such lofty capabilities as man, merely to mock him with a glimpse of what he can attain to, and then extinguish him for ever. The very thought has a tinge of malignity about it, or at any rate looks like a wanton waste of the noblest and sublimest of all kinds of energy. And then, to refer to but one other specimen, there are the moral disorders we witness everywhere around us—the lawlessness and injustice, the cruelty and oppression, "the wrong and outrage wherewith earth is filled." And how could we conceive of God as a just and righteous Ruler, if there be no hereafter of rewards and punishments—a judgment to come, in short, where all odds shall be made even, and where every work of man shall receive its meet recompence of reward?

But high as no doubt the probability is that these and such-like reasonings carry with them for the existence of a future state, they do not reach the full necessities of the case. There is still room for doubt and hesitation. "To be, or not to be," is still the question. The mind is still at

sea; still, like Columbus, scouring the waste of waters in quest of that other world, which has so firmly imbedded itself in the imagination. And while these deductions of reason may be to us what the driftwood and fragments of unfamiliar plants, floating past his vessel from day to day, were to Columbus—presumptive evidence that land was not far off—yet the new world is not actually sighted. "Life and immortality are not actually brought to light." Reason fails to say with certainty that an endless life is a reality. But where reason has sunk down exhausted, unable to go any farther, Revelation has come in to conduct us to the end of the mystery. The gulf is bridged. The land is sighted. Life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel. And the utterance which the Gospel gives regarding it is no faltering one, no uncertain sound, still leaving ground for suspicion, but clear and trumpet-tongued, announcing to us, from the heavens, that the surmises of reason are correct as far as they go, and that THERE IS ANOTHER AND UNENDING EXISTENCE BEYOND THE PRESENT. "I know that if my earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, I have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "This mortal shall put on immortality." "God so loved the world, that He gave His only bogotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have EVERLASTING LIFE."

And then, let us not conceive of that future life as if it were only some dreamy or ghostly kind of existence, dim and unsubstantial, and offering little employment for the powers and faculties which it is our happiness to exercise now. Paganism and philosophy, falsely so called, may have associated immortality with shadowy and unhuman fancies of this sort; but it is not the Christian idea. We may have to exist for a time as disembodied spirits, and under conditions altogether strange and unnatural to us; but that is

only a temporary state, and is not the fashion of the endless life held out to us in the Gospel of Christ. It will be a life *in the body*—a life on which we properly enter at the resurrection of the just. "*This mortal* shall put on immortality," is what God promises. And, more than probably, the sphere of that life will be this very world, delivered from the bondage of corruption, and restored to more than its pristine beauty. I firmly believe it to be no figure of speech, nor empty metaphysical conceit, but a literal and sober truth, that "the meek shall inherit the EARTH."

There is, then, an endless life. Reason suggests it, Revelation has confirmed it. And now let me say to you, as Jesus said to Martha, when speaking of the resurrection, "*Believest thou this?*" BELIEVEST thou that the portion awaiting those, whose "patient continuance in well-doing" attests their union to the Saviour, is "GLORY, HONOUR, IMMORTALITY—ETERNAL LIFE"? God says that it is. Believest thou this?

And oh what a sublime and soul-ennobling belief it is! To conceive that I, ushered into the world after the same manner as the brute creation, and like them sustained by the fruit of the ground—a poor frail creature, standing in jeopardy every hour, and crushed before the moth, and after a few years "this sensible warm motion becoming a kneaded clod,' and my existence apparently blotted out entirely from the face of creation—to think that I shall again stand upon the earth, and look upon the sun, and live and move and have a being so long as God Himself has! How stupendous the thought! And with what an awful interest does it invest us here, standing as we do between the winning and the losing of such a prize!

II. Let us consider briefly *how we may become possessed of an "endless life."*

You will observe that I have been hitherto confining myself, as I mean still to do, to that endless life which is offered to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Mere conscious existence for ever and ever is, we believe, the heritage of every child of Adam. For that, too, is a matter of Revelation. The wicked will exist as long as the righteous; and Scripture lends no countenance to the hypothesis of some, that the wicked will never be raised again, or if raised, it will only be to witness how much they have lost, and then be consumed in hell fire until they be nothing at all. There is no such doctrine in God's Word, but everything to oppose and condemn it. The wicked shall never perish in the sense of ceasing to exist. "Their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched."

But the existence which the wicked shall have is not dignified in Scripture by the name of *life*. They are dead while they live. Their existence is "the second death," because lost to all that is bright and pure and happy. But the endless life held out to us in the Gospel of Christ is LIFE worthy of the name—a pulsation from God's own life, and replete with all the light and blessedness that dwell in God.

And how, my brethren, may this life be ours? Why, SIMPLY BY ACCEPTING IT. It is God's free and sovereign gift, and it is ours for the taking. And that there may be no mistake about this, hear what God says: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16). And again, "The wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. vi. 23). And once more, Jesus Himself saith, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life" (John vi. 47).

As an ambassador for Christ, I must be careful not to

burden the matter, nor to complicate it, by anything human and unscriptural. And I repeat that this "endless life" is ours for the taking. It is awarded to faith, and that is just the same as saying that it is ours for the taking. "Whosoever believeth on Jesus hath everlasting life."

Of course it is both competent and incumbent upon me to remind you that all is not faith which goes under the name of faith. There is a faith "which is *dead*," and which is no real faith at all. Faith is a living principle, and wherever it is, it makes its presence seen and felt in working by love, in purifying the heart, and in overcoming the world. And hence, in one passage already quoted, it is this *practical* side of faith which is connected with life eternal. "God will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life (Rom. ii. 6, 7). But still the glad tidings of the Gospel remains unimpaired—that endless life is for the taking. It is awarded to unfeigned faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

How tremendous then, my dear friends, is the issue suspended on the question, "Have ye believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God?" "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John iii. 36).

III. Let us now consider what may be meant by "*the* POWER" of an endless life.

There are *two* aspects in which we may view this part of the subject.

1. We may try to conceive what will be the "power" of an "endless life" *when we have once entered upon it.*

What a power for advancement and improvement it will be in every department of knowledge and action! The

deep regret of all our best and noblest spirits now is that they have had so little space to bring to the light what they have felt to be wrapt up within them, and that they must sink into the tomb little better than infants of a span long. Their tiny boat is now swamped, by the cold and remorseless waters, ere they have little more than pushed out from the shore. They must quit their investigations when they have just begun to learn how to study. But what a boon will an endless life bring to such! They may then securely lay their plans for untold ages to come, without fear of interruption, assured that neither death nor accident can ever intervene to turn them from their object.

The power for good that an endless life will bring derives, perhaps, its most practical illustration from the results of the long lives which fell to the lot of the men who lived before the flood. Their lives, of course, fell infinitely short of an endless life, but yet they so much exceeded the utmost boundary of human life now (reaching, in many instances, to well-nigh a thousand years), that we may accept them as exemplifying the power of an endless life better than anything else which has ever been seen among men. No doubt the power was nearly always exemplified in the wrong direction. They lived to a great age, and rose to a height of great depravity. Every imagination of the thought of their heart was only evil continually. The earth was filled with violence by them. *But was not their great age the principal cause of their great depravity?* And if bad men now were permitted to live as long, and to develop themselves as fully as did the antediluvians, would they not be found as great, if not far greater, monsters of iniquity? The brief existence of men now is, perhaps, one of the world's best safeguards; for if the most of the men around us could live for centuries, giving full swing to their evil passions, and improving in the art of doing evil out of the resources of an ever-widening

experience, what prodigious powers for mischief they would become! what a hell the world would be turned to, filled with violence as of yore, and again demanding the forth-putting of God's devastating judgments!

But the power attaching to these long lives was not invariably exerted on the side of evil. The patriarch Enoch is a marked exception, and serves to show what a power resides in an endless life for advancement in godlikeness, and in everything well-pleasing in the sight of God. That patriarch lived but a short time in comparison with some of them—only 365 years—as many years as there are days in a year; a life extending to beyond three centuries and a half, and yet little more than a third of some of their lives; but by the diligent improvement of his privileges through that comparatively short time, and by the grace of God, he so advanced in holiness, and in the image of God, that, in the expressive language of Scripture, "He was not, for God took him." He passed into God's immediate and blissful presence without requiring to pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death. And if Enoch could make such approaches to the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ, under such adverse circumstances as the period before the flood presents, when "all flesh had corrupted its way before God," what will be the progress in connection with an endless life, when every hindrance has been removed, and when God is encouraging us, and beckoning us upward from one reach of glory to another, saying to us, as to John in Patmos, "Come up hither"?

But (2) there is another aspect in which the power of an endless life may strike us, and that is *in its influence over the life which we now live in the flesh.*

It is utterly impossible that any one can truly believe that he is the heir of that endless life, which the Gospel reveals, without being conscious that he is controlled and influenced

by it. Were we appointed to spend only a few years in some distant region of the globe, as, for example, in India or Australia, we could not fail to be influenced by such an appointment—WE should feel the "*power*" of it—and all the circle in which we move would very well discern in what direction our thoughts and interests were turning. And if it be our firm and settled persuasion that God, in His infinite mercy, is about to confer upon us the prize of an endless life, there can be no question but that we will be influenced by it; and that influence will be many-sided, and will show itself in connection with nearly every duty and relation of life. And hence the Apostle, in the chapter preceding this one, speaks of it as not *one* power merely, but *many*, and calls it "the *powers* of the world to come" (vi. 5). Let me now point out a few of the more obvious directions in which the belief in an endless life will be sure to manifest its "*power*."

1. If we be persuaded that we are the heirs of an endless life, we will be patient and uncomplaining under all forms of present ill.

These ills, that flesh is heir to, are neither few nor small. "Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble." One is burdened with an infirm body, which is little else than a hospital of diseases. Another, who may have the blessing of good health, is worried and distracted by endless cares and anxieties about his worldly affairs. A third, who has both health and leisure, finds his life embittered by wayward relatives or unfaithful friendships. "There is a skeleton in every house;" or, "*There's aye a something*," as we say, to keep everything like complete happiness at a wide distance from us. And these annoyances tell very heavily upon some. "Life," they come to say, "is not worth having;" and were it not for "that fear of something after death," which "gives us pause," they might be tempted

some moment to rid themselves of it. But then it is plain in the case of these persons, who take such ills so sorely to heart, that they have no faith in an endless life to sustain them. This world is the only portion they have accustomed themselves to look to, and consequently, when it fails them, or gets seriously deranged, they are inconsolable, and driven to the verge of despair. "You have taken away my gods, and what have I left?" But if a man be fully assured, as he may be by the unerring promises of God, that he has an endless life before him, in which to pick up all the broken threads of this one, and go forward in an unending progression, he will not be greatly moved, though a portion of this life should appear to miscarry, nor even though the whole of it should miscarry. What matters it, and what is it, when compared with the "eternal weight of glory"? Surely these are but "light afflictions, and only for a moment."

2. The belief in an endless life will show its "*power*" in stimulating us to prepare for that life to come.

It would argue a degree of insensibility, bordering almost upon idiocy, for any one to have the prospect, at no distant day, of occupying some post of honour and responsibility among his fellows, and yet to be showing no anxiety or care about fitting himself for his duties. The thing is next to incredible. And it is even more incredible, yea, absolutely impossible, that one can believe himself to be the heir of an endless life, and yet take no thought or pains to have both his mind and heart schooled and trained for the high and holy employments which will devolve upon him. In the Galatians (iv. 1) we read that "the heir, as long as he is a child, *differeth* nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all." He is arrayed in no lordly vestments, has his stated allowance like a servant, can exercise no more authority than what is permitted him, and is in subjection just like a

servant. But there are other respects in which he differs very materially from a servant, and the Apostle is fully alive to these. He is "under tutors and governors," whose daily tasks are all aiming in the one direction of fitting and preparing him to grace and adorn the exalted station awaiting him. And if we could penetrate the secret musings of the heir, we should find that his thoughts are not the thoughts of a hireling, intent on menial pursuits and board and wages, but on the happy era to come, when he shall be of full age, and when the mansion and all the domains shall be his. And so will it be with us, if we be the heirs of an endless life. Outwardly we will affect to be nothing better than others, differing nothing from servants, and serving with a will and to the utmost of our ability; but yet, remembering that we are the heirs of God, delighting to turn over the family papers in secret, and to muse upon their contents, and accepting all God's dealings with us in grace and providence as the "tutors and governors" appointed by Him, and whose lessons we are diligently seeking to improve, that we may be found "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light."

3. And in the *third* and last place, the belief in our endless life will show its "*power*" in delivering us from the fear of death.

No doubt a certain fear of death is natural to us, and there is an element of dread about it that not even faith can wholly get the better of, and I suppose is not intended to get the better of. It is the wages of sin, a curse that man was never made to carry; and even though fully persuaded of the home of many mansions beyond, we cannot set foot in the dark avenue leading to it without an instinctive shudder and a disposition to say, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." This fear of death, which holds many of even the Lord's people in bondage, may be compared to the dread

that some of you may have of the sea. You have loved ones in some distant land, and right fain would you be with them, never to part more. But the great stormy ocean lying between you and them deters and frightens you, and you linger on where you are. And so the believer would right willingly depart and be with Christ, and join the white-robed multitude upon the eternal shore, but the dark and chilly waters he must cross make him afraid to launch away.

But the Lord's people should strive to overcome this fear of death, at any rate to the extent of not being all their lifetime subject to bondage by it. We must beware of lending any colour of truth to that taunt of the infidel, that we are ever extolling heaven, and yet doing all we can to keep out of it as long as possible; affecting to be very heavenly minded, and yet clinging to the earth with all the relish and tenacity of the veriest worldling.

If we subject this fear of death to some slight analysis, we shall find it resulting, I think, from *two* causes; and the belief in an endless life, I further think, has power enough to counterbalance both, and to reduce the fear of death to the smallest possible amount.

(1) The fear of death results from the love of life. We fear to die because death appears to be an end of *living*. But if the Word of God has convinced us that this is *only* an *appearance*, and that death, so far from *ending* our life, only ushers us into the "*endless* life," why should death cause us any great alarm, seeing that the continuity of life is not broken, and that the love of life need suffer no diminution, and that by dying we have life more abundantly?

(2) The fear of death results in great measure from our ignorance of what shall be *after* death.

Mystery is always more or less a torment. The hand that unnerved Belshazzar derived, I should fancy, its most hor-

rifying influence from the fact that it was attached to no *body*. It was only a hand. And so death is feared by us, not so much from what we know of it, as from *what we do not know*. We see the skeleton hand, but what is behind it? What is that "something after death" that so puzzles the will,

> "And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
> Than fly to others that we know not of"?

That mystery is resolved by the Gospel. Much mystery, no doubt, still surrounds the act of dying, but we know that absence from the body is presence with the Lord, and all else is mere detail. The heart of the mystery is plucked from it. *We shall be with Jesus*, and that being *right*, NOTHING ELSE CAN BE WRONG.

Let us strive, therefore, to accustom ourselves to look on death somewhat in the way that the New Testament writers do. They say very little about death compared with what they say about the eternal glory. Death is overlooked and lost sight of by them, as if it were no more than a mere speck floating on the disc of the heavenly luminary, and calling for hardly a single word of remark. We have no wish to see any one professing the Christian name treating death with bravado and braggadocio. That is the part of the fool and the atheist. But we do wish to see death met in the calm and confident spirit of the Psalmist: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." And nothing under heaven will so certainly produce that calm and confident mind as the conviction that the valley of death is but the gloomy vestibule to an "endless life."

And now, in conclusion, let me exhort you once more to occupy your minds more earnestly than you have done

hitherto with this theme of an endless life. Nothing that I know of is better fitted to exalt and ennoble all our faculties, to withdraw us from every mean and grovelling pursuit, and to supply us with unfailing consolation under every disappointment and trial which this present time can lay upon us. It is one of the marks of the unregenerate, as Scripture tells us, that they "*cannot see afar off.*" The things of time contract their horizon, and hide from them the things which are unseen and eternal. They perceive not this prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. And yet, in one sense, it is not "*far off,*" nor needs any painful search to find it. As Scripture says, it is "nigh thee, even in thy mouth," and yet how many miss it! Like the Spaniards who first took possession of California, they are daily walking among mines of untold wealth, and know it not; yea, worse, they know it, and disregard it. Eternal life is offered them, but they prefer the fleeting vanities of time, and choose death rather than life. Can infatuation reach beyond this? And yet how many of us are the willing victims of it!

The subject which has been engaging our attention very specially concerns the various ages among us, and with addressing a word to the three leading periods of life I would now conclude.

1. *To the young*—to all of you, say, under twenty years of age. Perhaps, my dear young friends, you may still be under the spell of that enchantment I spake of at the outset, and which would make all we say to you, touching the shortness of time, and the little we can do in it, to savour of mere crabbedness and ill-nature, and as if our speaking thus were owing to ourselves having been soured and disappointed in life, and that it may prove a very different thing to you. We protest that it is not so. We speak forth the words of truth and soberness. We have no wish

certainly to shatter your ideal world, and to torment you before your time, by thrusting upon you the chill and stern realities awaiting you. Enjoy your dream while you can. The waking will come soon enough. But it would be well if that wakening should not too rudely surprise you. And, with a view to prepare for it, we tell you, on the authority of all who have passed through life before you, and better still, on the authority of God's Word, that you will not find life to be the flowery and sunny path that you take it to be; and that when you come to part with it, as sooner or later you must, you will confess with Solomon at the close of even his splendid career, that all has been "Vanity," except what you have done in securing an interest in the Gospel salvation. Be that then the main object of your pursuit. Win Christ, and be found in Him. Honour and serve Him with all your heart and mind and strength; and then, though your sun should go down while it is yet morning, and you must bid adieu to this world with hardly anything accomplished of all that you had imagined to do, what matters it? There is a good time coming. You have an endless life to work in, and in which to expatiate, without fear or hindrance, over all the fields of knowledge and service.

2. Those of us in the strength and vigour of life should also seek to carry away a lesson of wisdom from this subject. You, my friends, are over with the romance of life. You have awakened to the consciousness that you are no longer young. You have sighted the reality of things, and are face to face with the hard and prosaic facts of existence. And how do you like them? And even supposing that they are yielding you a fair return in money, and in all the comforts and elegancies that money can command, are they such as you can contentedly pass your days among, and expend all your vigour upon them? Nay, I am sure they are not; and

are you not looking beyond them to a period of retirement and leisure, when at last you can have something to your mind, something congenial, some space for developing the better thoughts and aspirations which you think lodge within you? But this is a vain expectation—a fond delusion. No such leisure awaits you, or if it *seem* to come, it will be found a very different thing from what you anticipated. It will not answer your purpose. You will be as far from rest as ever. Seek it not therefore. You see what a hurly-burly life is, a very witch's caldron of "bubble, bubble, toil and trouble." And you must round about it while your limbs can carry you. Or, to speak in another figure, your boat is now in the rapids. You feel that the grasp of the mighty waters is upon you, and it is no use contending with them. Resign yourself therefore to the common fate, and lend all your effort to steer evenly, and take the Niagara straight. And the consolation we offer you is, that that plunge into the mist and darkness will not be the end of you. The river beyond the fall is the "river of the water of life." And—

> "Life's crystal river,
> Storms ruffle never.
> Anchor we ever
> On that calm tide."

3. Our subject is particularly replete with consolation for the aged among us.

Your experience of this life, my aged friends, is now drawing to a close, and I am sure that I need not address any proofs to you to convince you that life is the troubled dream, and the world the unsatisfying portion, which the Word of God declares them to be. When you first awoke to the fact that time is swiftly passing, perhaps it only made you cling to it all the more tenaciously, as if by so doing you could retard it in its flight. But it was only like grasping a snow-

ball. The more firmly it is held, the more rapidly it melts. And the older you grew, the more swiftly time seemed to pass, until now only a few sands remain, and you must soon bid us your last adieu. And you know how futile was your early expectation that age would bring with it such a season of calm repose as would enable you to work and develop the hidden treasures of your inner man. You feel that your time for work is over. Your leisure, if you have any, is not that of the trim and stately barque becalmed in mid ocean, and ready with outspread sails to catch the favouring breeze, but the calm rather of one of those worn-out hulks that may be seen idly floating in the dock, and awaiting its turn to have its timbers taken asunder. Verily, if there were no hereafter, and no such life as our text proclaims, the aged might well be borne with and excused for all that murmuring and fretfulness which so often attach to them. But if the faith of Christ be in them, all real ground of murmuring is done away. Now is their salvation nearer than when they believed. Their journey is about over; and since they have a place prepared for them, and a home awaiting them, what matters it though the few last steps of the journey be upon blistered feet and tottering limbs? The rest will be all the sweeter.

May God, by His grace, enable all of us to lay hold of an endless life, and may we now be visibly under the *power* of it, dying unto this present world, and living by the powers of that world to come! Amen.

II.

THE RICHES OF GOD.

"God, who is rich in mercy."—EPH. ii. 4.

MANY are the precious sentences in the Word of God, and the one we are going to consider at present is not the least of them,—"God, who is rich in mercy." I laid my hand on a book some time ago, entitled "Bosom Lines," and which I found to contain little scraps from the poets, especially Wordsworth,—sweet suggestive expressions that one would like to have engraven on the memory, and by which the soul might give expression, in poetic words and figures, to all its varied moods of thought and feeling. And how full of bosom lines is God's own Word to God's own child!

"How sweet unto my taste, O Lord,
Are all Thy words of truth!"

And none is sweeter than this, "God, who is rich in mercy." It rings in the ear like a note flung from angelic harps, and it is a bosom sentence which is never superannuated nor out of date. I am always needing mercy. And if, in this tabernacle of clay, I could be like the white-robed multitude who cease not day nor night to celebrate the high praises of God, I think I should want no better theme for my ceaseless song than that it might be "God, who is rich in mercy."

In commenting for a little on this description of God, we shall consider—

I. The aspect in which we are here invited to contemplate God, namely, as being *rich*—"God, who is *rich*."

II. We shall speak of this quality of mercy, in which the wealth of God pre-eminently consists—"God, who is rich in *mercy*."

III. We must glance at a few of the ways in which God has shown Himself to be rich in mercy.

And may the Holy Spirit open our eyes to see, and our hearts to receive, "The exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii. 7).

I. *About God being "rich."*

This manner of speaking of God is peculiar to Paul. He often uses it in all his writings: "The same Lord is rich to all that call on Him" (Rom. x. 12); "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness?" (Rom. ii. 4); "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. xi. 33); "The riches of His glory;" "The unsearchable riches of Christ," and so forth. And no other New Testament writer employs this same manner of speech. And as Paul says of Esaias, that "he is very bold" (Rom. x. 20), so I think we may say the same of Paul himself. It is a bold thing to call God *rich*—to apply to Him an epithet so purely mundane and human. To be rich is to have more than we need, more than we know how to make a good use of, and which we require to lay aside for future wants and emergencies. But the great God is infinitely removed from all such paltry ideas. And, immense as His possessions are, He has nothing superfluous, nothing that He does not know what to do with, nothing requiring to be hoarded for future demands. And it would be a sorry compliment, therefore, and would savour even of impiety, inasmuch as it would be regarding God as though He were altogether such an one as ourselves, were we to call Him

rich in our own sense of the term—rich in gold, and goods, and lands, and cattle, and servants. He does not deign to be called rich in respect to these. And it is not in respect to these that Paul calls Him "rich," or speaks of His "riches." And yet God is rich, and wants to have the reputation of being rich. But what are His possessions that He attaches the idea of personal wealth to? Nothing physical, nothing material, nothing which we account riches. God's riches are moral and spiritual. His goodness, His grace, His mercy, His long-suffering—these are His treasures, and it is in regard to these that He wants to be known and admired as rich.

Now since the thoughts of God, as far as we can enter into them, should be what ought to sway and direct us in our whole life and conduct, His account of what His own wealth consists in should assist us in distinguishing between "the true riches," and what are only a caricature of them, and a delusion and a snare. In one view of it, the whole of religion may be said to consist in revolutionising our opinions about riches, teaching us to discern as riches what God calls riches—goodness, grace, mercy, truth—and to regard what the world calls riches as merely things by the way, things which our heavenly Father knows we have need of, and of which He will give us as much as we need. To be truly rich is to be "rich in faith," "rich towards God," rich in the way that God is rich, abounding in goodness, and mercy, and truth. These constitute "the good part that can never be taken from you," the treasure in heaven, which no rust shall eat, and which no thieves can steal.

II. Let us look now specially at this quality of mercy in which God wishes to be reputed rich. "God, who is rich in *mercy*."

If asked to say precisely what mercy is, I would answer that it is the very highest manifestation of goodness or benevolence. Its source is love, and it is simply love showing itself after a particular manner—the manner, namely, which most fully demonstrates its presence and power. Mercy is love going forth to the ill-deserving and the miserable. When God shows love to His holy and unfallen creatures, such as the angels in heaven, it is nothing more than benevolence, and has nothing very remarkable about it; for what else should God do than love the lovely, and reward the well-deserving? But when love finds its way in acts of untiring goodness to creatures who are unlovely, who delight to mar God's image, and to outrage all His commandments, how great is that love! And it is such love that is called mercy, and is the very highest manifestation of the Divine goodness. All the riches of everything lovely and tender in the Divine nature are gathered up, and have, as it were, been pressed, as you would press the choicest grapes, into the cup of mercy, and He holds it out to us, saying, "Drink abundantly."

Had the Divine love never required to rise to the height of mercy--that is to say, had there never been any sin—the universe could have never known how great that love of God is. Its highest manifestation in mercy would never have been required of it. It would have still been stretching out before the intelligent universe as a great, calm, shining ocean, but its depths unthought of and untried. They might be skimming its surface, glassed in its waters, rocked on its throbbing bosom, fanned by its zephyrs, regaled by its billowy music, but none caring, because none needing, to find its soundings. But sin supplied the lead, and the redemption work has been the sounding line; and for nearly six thousand years now has the lead been sinking, but yet no bottom is reported. There is still forgiveness with Him,

still mercy and grace. And the universe has ever and anon to reiterate the cry, "O the height, and the depth, and the length, and the breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus! it passeth knowledge."

In this way our subject may be regarded as touching on that most mysterious of all problems—the origin of evil. It does not explain that origin, but it at least testifies to one great advantage arising from God permitting it to exist. God could have never been known as He is known, nor loved as He is loved, had there been no evil. He would have been, to a large extent, an "unknown God," even to those nearest His throne. The qualities which He accounts His "riches"—His mercy, His patience, His long-suffering—could never have been known, nor their very existence suspected, because there would have been no objects requiring their exercise. Evil was as needful to manifest the glory of God, as darkness is needful to manifest the glories of the firmament. And yet God was not the originator of evil; but being originated, He has turned it to good account for the furtherance of His own glory. And we may even lawfully thank Him that He has permitted evil to exist, inasmuch as, through it, He has manifested how rich He is in mercy.

III. *Some of the ways by which God has shown Himself to be rich in mercy.*

We may form some conception of how great must have been God's compassion for sinners, when He submitted to such a sacrifice in order to give effect to it. "He so loved the world, that He spared not His only begotten Son."

The surest and the readiest means which we have of gauging the depth and intensity of any feeling or sentiment is to consider how much it will sacrifice in order to get its own way. If a man says he loves an individual, or loves a cause,

let us see what he will do for them when that cause demands action. And judged by this criterion, how rich is God's mercy! His compassion for sinners could be of no avail to them so long as law and justice held them prisoners. They must die the death pronounced against all the disobedient and unrighteous. And rather than that His mercy should not have its perfect work, and reach its objects, He gave His own Son to die that death for them, and to bear that curse for them. So full was His mercy, that it must have vent at any and every cost. Not even the love He bore to His own Son would He allow to stop the way. He gave Him up. He sacrificed Him, that His mercy might reach us. What a depth of meaning, then, is there in that little word "*so*"! "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." Surely God is rich in mercy!

Another way in which we may perceive the riches of God's mercy is to reflect on how that mercy is extolled in Scripture. Scripture is the *Word* of God. It is God revealing Himself. And, in what He says of Himself, there is no boasting, no vain-glorying, but the words of truth and soberness. And when we find Him extolling His own mercy as the real riches of His nature, we ought implicitly to confide in that view. And this is the attribute which He Himself places highest and foremost. When the revelation of Himself began to be systematically made, even under the dispensation which we call "legal," His mercy was moved to the front. "The Lord passed by before Moses, and proclaimed the name of the Lord;" and it was "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6). And, all through that dispensation, God's chosen place, where He treated with sinners, was named by Himself "the *mercy* seat." The contents of the covenant are "the true *mercies* of David." "He delighteth in mercy." And in proof of it

you find that all the most exultant songs of Scripture are in praise of mercy. And every one of His mighty acts is attributed to mercy, as in that noble Psalm, the hundred and thirty-sixth: "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods, for His mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the Lord of lords, for His mercy endureth for ever. To Him alone who doeth great wonders, for His mercy endureth for ever." And what is it which inspires the "nobler songs above," but the doings of God's mercy? "And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. v. 9). And do you think that this attribute would hold the place which it does in the church on earth, and in the church in heaven, in time and in eternity, in God's *own* estimation, and in the estimation of all His holy and happy creatures, were it not the *very riches of God?*

We may gather how rich in mercy God is by considering the parties whom it has already reached and blessed.

Their number is beyond computation: "A great multitude that no man can number." Their pedigree belongs to the entire race of Adam: "Every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Their positions, on earth, embrace every variety and condition of men—rich and poor, high and lowly, wise and ignorant, bond and free. And, as sinners, they range over every shade and degree of guilt, from Jeroboam's child, whom the Lord took because He saw some good things in him (1 Kings xiv. 13), to the very chief of sinners,—the dying thief, or him "who obtained mercy, and who before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious" (1 Tim. i. 13).

And I trust I may appeal to some among yourselves, who

have obtained mercy, to testify how rich in mercy God has been to you. It was surely no ordinary mercy that saved *you*. Your heart was fully set in you to do evil; God was not in all your thoughts. The Saviour had no charm nor interest for you; your feet took hold on hell, and a step or two further might have precipitated you into the burning abyss, when His hand was laid upon you, and plucked you as a brand from the burning. And oh, was He not rich in mercy? Can your tongue extol it as it deserves? And are you not a living proof that mercy is even in the heavens, and above the heavens?

How fain should we lay hold on any natural imagery which might adequately set forth the riches of God's mercy! but everything we can set our eyes upon lags far beneath the height of this great argument. We stand by the broad, rolling river, and reflect on how many thousand years it has flowed on, and how many generations of men and beasts have drunk of it, and that yet it shows no sign of want nor waste. And we look upon the sun, which has been flooding his family of worlds with light and heat, and all their attendant blessings, ever since creation's dawn, and that yet he shines as brilliantly upon us now as upon Adam when he first lifted his wondering eyes to him. But, sublime as these images are, and approximately near as they come to what we desiderate, they are far from being commensurate with the fulness of God's mercy. For that river shall be dried up with the fires of the last judgment, and yon sun shall grow dim, and sink in age, and as a vesture shall the heavens be changed. But God's mercy *endureth*, and His redeemed shall bask in it for ever and ever.

Let me hope that these considerations may be useful to God's people among you in the way of exalting your appreciation of the Divine mercy, and may also encourage

any among you who have been brought to cry with the publican, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" but who may have doubts and fears about that mercy reaching to you. If you have now apprehended the riches of God's mercy, these doubts and fears will be gone, and your burdened and trembling soul may now at once enter into rest. He was as rich in mercy as you need in the days of old, and His are not the riches which get exhausted through large and frequent disbursements. Giving doth not impoverish Him. His hand is not shortened that it cannot save. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

But if His mercy be to save you, you must take to it as being, in very deed and truth, the rich thing that we have been declaring it to be. It won't do to have any other dependence, as if it were not enough for you, and as if you had better have something in reserve—something of your own to eke it out, in case it cannot reach to all your necessities. There must be no doubts nor misgivings of that kind. That would be to regard God as *poor* and *niggard* in mercy. The timid swimmer will never strike out upon the water, so long as he can find any footing. He must be pushed beyond his depth before he will trust himself to the water alone. And no one will trust himself to the blood alone, so long as he retains any foothold in his own righteousness. Away, then, with all such miserable props and makeshifts. Trust God as rich in mercy—able and willing to save you to the uttermost. Why should the unsearchable riches of Christ be insulted by being put in the balance against any riches of your own? Your are poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked, and have need of all things. And all things are of "God, who is rich in mercy."

But although God be rich in mercy, we must not suppose that that mercy is uncircumscribed by any rules or con-

siderations whatever. Though He be *all merciful*—able to save to the uttermost all who come unto Him—He is not *all mercy*, nothing but mercy, and showing Himself to none in any other aspect. In Him mercy and truth meet together. He is merciful *on principle;* and just as the ever-flowing river is bounded and restrained by its banks, so has God's mercy its boundaries assigned to it by His wisdom and truth, by what is due to Himself as the Sovereign Ruler of all. One boundary of His mercy to sinners is time. There is no boundary to the redeemed. In their case His "mercy endureth for ever." But for the impenitent there are boundaries, and one of them is time. There is a "day of grace," and it will come to a close for the whole fallen race of Adam. And another boundary is this world. Others may be saved for ages to come; but if you pass away unpardoned, there is no mercy for you :—

> "In the cold grave, to which we haste,
> There are no acts of pardon past."

Nay, further, there is a boundary to God's mercy even in this life. Where it is, we cannot say, and we dare not determine in the case of any, but it is an awful certainty notwithstanding. One may so long resist and grieve the Holy Spirit, may so long repel the offered mercy, that it may be for ever withdrawn, and no space for repentance left. And the knowledge of these limitations has been communicated to us, that we may deal wisely and promptly with God's offer of mercy while we have it. "To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart." Amen.

III.

THE CHRISTIAN'S ESTIMATE OF LIFE AND DEATH.

"To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—PHIL. i. 21.

IT may be affirmed, in soberest truth, that Christianity, if it be worth *anything*, is worth *everything*. There is no medium between its being the highest good and being nothing at all. It is necessarily one or the other. Many things of the nature of commercial speculations and investments for capital may at first be greatly overrated as to the amount of profit they are to yield; but they need not necessarily be abandoned, though they fall greatly short of the first expectations. There may be profit in them still, though on a greatly reduced scale, and may be retained at what they are worth. But if we subtract from the profit held out to us by Christianity, even the smallest amount, we ruin it. It entirely collapses, and becomes utterly worthless. The prize it holds out to us is the richest and noblest we can imagine—the redemption of our whole being, soul and body—eternal life in God's immoveable and unfading kingdom. And were it to fall anything short of conferring that prize upon us, there would be no profit in it. It would prove an entire failure, a delusion and a snare. It is *everything* or nothing, the sublimest reality or the most heartless mockery. And assuming that we have investigated the claims of Christianity, and have found them valid, is it too much to expect that it should hold the

uppermost and foremost place in our minds and hearts? If we believe it to be *everything*, to us it will be *everything*, the one thing needful, the pearl of greatest price which we carry about in our bosom, and guard with jealous care. When we see it set over against all the creature comforts and gains and honours that the world can offer us, we will be ready to say with Paul, in another place, "I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." And when we reflect on the highest and most blessed ends and objects for which we can live and die, and spend and be spent, if Christ hold the first place in our hearts, with him again we will be ready to say, in the words of our text, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." We have in this text two statements, which we shall examine separately.

I. *The Apostle asserts that to him to live is Christ.* "To me to live is Christ." This cast of expression is peculiar, and is evidently selected by the Apostle for the sake of its emphasis and comprehensiveness. He does not, you will observe, particularize any phase of his life with which Christ is to be specially connected. He does not say, for example, that Christ is the origin, the inspiration, the pattern, the end or object of his life. He purposely leaves the whole matter indefinite and undefined. He merely says that to live is Christ. And what is the effect of adhering to this indefinite manner of speech? Why this, that there is no view of life that we can light upon, that it does not apply to. View life as we please, turn ourselves round towards every one of its relations and duties and engagements, Christ meets us, as claiming all, and consecrating all. *To live is Christ.* No aspect of a Christian's life can be imagined, in which Christ does not hold an essential and indispensable place. He and life are indis-

solubly bound together. As he said Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the LIFE."

But let us endeavour to illustrate the indefinite and comprehensive expression of the Apostle by enumerating a few of the particular cases included in it.

1. There is a true sense in which every one in the world may employ the words, "To me to live is Christ," inasmuch as every one owes his natural life to Christ. And here I do not so much refer to the fact that Christ is our Creator, "without whom there was nothing made that was made," as to the fact that it is in virtue of His mediatorship and intercession that the world is kept in existence, and that the wicked are not speedily consumed. We read that "Christ is the Saviour of all men, but *especially* of them that believe" (1 Tim. iv. 10). There is a high and peculiar sense in which He is the Saviour of believers, but there is a sense in which *all* are bound to recognise Him as their Saviour. Were it not for Him, the career of the impenitent would soon terminate. His intercession is their only shield. He pleads for a respite for them. He does not allow the tares to be plucked up and consigned to their own place meanwhile, in case the wheat might suffer by it; and surely it ill becomes the impenitent to make light of the name of Christ, for all the comfort and enjoyment they have in this world they owe directly to Him. For them to live is Christ. It is for Christ's sake alone that they are allowed to live at all.

2. The expression of the Apostle is specially appropriate in the mouth of the believer, who looks to Christ as the *author* and *sustainer* of his spiritual life. "To me to live is Christ."

This is the life that Christ meant when He said, "I am the life;" which Paul means when he speaks of "Christ who is our life," and of "our life which is hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii.).

This is the life which can never see corruption. The ordinary manna which the Israelites daily collected, if kept for more than a day, presently corrupted and bred worms, but that which was laid up in the tabernacle, hidden in the golden pot in the ark of the testimony, and below the mercy-seat, corrupted not, and was designed to endure through all generations. And so it is with our ordinary life in the flesh. Like the daily manna, it soon corrupts and decays. But the life which is hid with Christ in God, the spiritual life communicated by the Holy Ghost, is as incorruptible and enduring as the life of God Himself; for it is literally and truly the life of God in us. It is not we who live, but Christ that liveth in us. "Because I live," said Christ, "ye shall live also."

And Christ is the Author of this life. He quickeneth whom He will. He laid down His own life that He might become the Author of this life to all the heirs of salvation. "The bread that I will give is my flesh, that I will give for the life of the world."

And as He is the *Author* of it, He is no less its *sustainer* and *preserver*. *We live by Christ.* All the people of Egypt were made to live daily and hourly by the hands of Joseph. He was their life. They must have died but for him. And he was just a type or living image of what Christ is to His people. All nourishment is garnered up in Him; and to him they apply for daily bread; and out of His fulness they all receive. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

3. By the expression before us, the Apostle further meant that Christ was the *pattern* of his life: "To me to live is Christ;" "I strive to regulate my life by His."

So completely alienated from the life of God had mankind become, that it required a most extraordinary assemblage of ways and means to bring them back to the paths of piety

and obedience. It did not suffice to tell us what is right. Mere explanations of godliness were a dead language, conveying no meaning to us. The Lord had to *show* us what is good—had to teach us by a living example, and that example is the life of His own Son. He hath left us an example, that we should follow His steps. It does not seem to have been needful to His atoning work that the Son of God should have mixed in all the scenes, and gone through all the labours, that we read of in the Gospels. For bare atonement, death on the cross would have sufficed. But the fact is, that His mission had a twofold object in view: first and primarily, to make atonement for us by the sacrifice of Himself; secondly, to show us how to live unto God. Our calling as Christians is immensely simplified and cleared up by Christ's own life in the flesh. It is all reduced to *following* Him. And the way He went is so plain and well marked, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err regarding it. As the sovereign and unsearchable Jehovah, His footsteps are not known; but as the Son of man, the Servant of the Father, and our Shepherd and Captain and Forerunner, His footsteps are more distinctly marked in the writings of the Evangelists than those "footsteps on the sands of time," now consolidated into hardest rock, which excite the interest and curiosity of the geologist. And we have only to place our steps in the prints of His steps, to be sure that we are in the right way, and are journeying to where Jesus has gone before.

4. But I remark lastly, under this head, that, by the expression before us, the Apostle meant that Christ's glory was the end and object of his life. "To me to live is Christ." I live *for* Christ; and life has no charm for me except in so far as I can promote the glory of Christ by it.

Selfishness, of the narrowest and blindest description, is the most usual manifestation of our unregenerate nature;

and every unregenerate man, if he would speak truly, would be for altering the Apostle's words to something like this, each one saying, according to his own particular bent or temperament, "For me to live is money, pleasure, personal display, rank, honour, learning, or many other things," but all resolving itself into this, "For me to live is SELF." "Who is Lord over me?" "And shall not I do as I please?" That is the bent and tendency of the unrenewed mind. And the first and strongest evidence that the mind is renewed is that self is visibly dethroned, and that Christ has accorded to Him the place which self formerly occupied. "To me to live is Christ." I care not what account is made of me, so that much is made of Christ. Let me hide myself behind Him, that He only may be seen. I shall live in vain, if my life do not glorify Christ. Let Him be "magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death." He has given Himself all to me, and I give myself all to Him. His vows are upon me, and I live to pay them. "For me to live is Christ."

II. The second statement of the Apostle is, "*To die is gain.*"

There is one word in that expression intensely interesting to worldly men—the magic word "*gain.*" No word catches their attention, nor excites so lively an interest, as that. What will not most men do and dare for gain? Well, in addition to the many other arguments by which we seek to induce men to enter into genuine fellowship with Christ, we can use the argument derived from *gain.* There is gain to be got—to be got in many ways, but specially in the way that the Apostle here mentions. But, oh! imagine the horror of the worldling when told that the gain is in dying—"To die is gain."

How sharply and irreconcilably do the Gospel and all the sentiments and expressions of the carnal mind come

into conflict here! If there be one thing in all the world more than any other that the unrenewed and unbelieving heart of man more completely dissociates from every idea of gain, it is death. To him it is all *loss*—pure and unmitigated and hopeless loss—the loss of possessions and friends, the rending asunder of the most cherished ties, the abandonment of every favourite pursuit, the annihilation of every bright and cherished hope. How can he ever bring himself to speak of death as *gain?* But here is one undoubted instance at least. Paul so spake, "To me to die is gain;" and thousands of others can be pointed to, who were brought to the same mind, and by the selfsame means—the faith in Jesus. They can enter into the spirit of the quaint words of old George Herbert:—

> "Death, thou wast once an uncouth, hideous thing;
> But, since our Saviour's death
> Has put some blood into thy face,
> Thou hast grown, sure a thing to be desired,
> And full of grace."

But, of course, we are aware that it is not death by itself, and on its own account, that is desirable, or full of grace, or which has anything of gain connected with it. Death by itself is, in every view, revolting, and to be shrunk from. It is "the wages of sin"—God's curse upon a rebellious world. And God has no desire to reconcile us to death on its own account, but rather to hate it more, and to secure the most signal triumph over it. The gain is in what is beyond death—in the bright world, to which it is only the dark vestibule. What makes death so terrible a prospect to most men is that the prospect beyond it is darker and drearier than death itself. If they could only be sure of that immortal life and blessedness whereof we speak, death would be reft of all his terrors, and they would learn with the Apostle to speak of it as "gain."

The Apostle saw that light, and was assured of that life. But his position was nothing more than what any of us may attain to. The Spirit of God is as able and willing to work faith in us as in him—that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen."

> "The want of sight faith well supplies;
> It makes the pearly gates appear;
> Far into distant worlds it pries,
> And brings eternal glories near."

Let us glance at two or three considerations which may have passed through the Apostle's mind when he spoke of death as "gain."

1. Death to the believer is obviously gain, because it terminates for ever all the tribulations he was exposed to here.

It is God's own appointment that His people, through much tribulation, must enter into the kingdom. The kind and degree of tribulation are different in every case, and vary with the age and country in which their lot is cast. But the rule holds in all cases, that in the world they shall have tribulation. It forms an important part of their discipline, disengaging their affections from perishable objects, and trying and purifying them like silver in a furnace. But although great good is thus got from tribulation, and the believer is not only encouraged to bear it, but even to rejoice in it, yet of itself it is not "joyous," but "grievous;" and he may well rejoice when its mission is accomplished, and the painful discipline ceases. And at death it is done. Error and superstition have prolonged it after death in the regions of purgatory. But purgatory is a wild fable concocted by priestly craft. The believer's purgatory is here, and while he is yet at home in the body. And when he leaves the body, he is carried by the ministering

angels straight to where Jesus is, and to that company which hungers no more, neither thirsts any more, and where God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

2. A second thing which makes death a "gain" to the believer is that he is no more defiled and tormented by the motions of sin.

One of the heaviest, nay, THE VERY HEAVIEST grief of God's child in this world is the hold which sin still retains over him, to make him falter and stray from the right path, and to defile his conscience, and interrupt his communion with his Father and Elder Brother. He can fully enter into Paul's experience when he cries, "O wretched man that I am!" Well, at death complete deliverance is brought him. The body of sin is put off, in order to be regenerated through dissolution, and the spirit is freed from its taint and evil companionship. Under the ceremonial law, any earthen vessel employed about the Temple that became defiled, required to be broken to free it of the defilement; and it was then re-fashioned, as a vessel of honour, fit for the Master's use; in which we recognise a figure of how our bodies are to be freed of their defilements. They must be broken—taken to pieces—reduced to their kindred dust —and then He who fashioned them at first will fashion them again, and upon a higher model than ever—on the model of that body which is worn by Christ in the midst of the throne. We shall be like Him. This corruption shall put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality.

3. The last thing I mention as making death "gain" to the believer is the fact that it introduces him into the immediate society of Jesus, and to the whole assembly of the Church of God in heaven.

This was, perhaps, the principal thought before the Apostle's mind in calling death gain, as would appear from *the words of* ver. 23, which are added by way of explanation:

"Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better."

One of the purest pleasures we can taste on earth is to be brought home, after a prolonged absence, to those whom we admire and love. And if the Lord Jesus be the object of our supreme affection—the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely—how transporting to be brought into His immediate presence, to see the King in His beauty, and to receive warm words of welcome from His own lips! And this is what awaits the believer at death. He departs to be with Jesus. Absent from the body, he is present with the Lord.

And though Jesus Himself is enough to satisfy his utmost desires, there are others there whose presence will contribute to the gain of heaven. There are our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and gone before us, and whom we meet again, nevermore to separate;

> "There death-divided friends at last
> Shall meet, to part no more."

And neither are these all. Is it nothing to meet and to mingle with all the worthies from faithful Abel downwards, including prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, and reformers? We shall see them all, and shall be recognised as members of the same family as them—the one family of the Firstborn which are written in heaven.

> "One army of the living God,
> At His command we bow;
> Part of the host have crossed the flood,
> And part are crossing now.
>
> E'en now by faith we join our hands
> With those that went before,
> And greet the blood-besprinkled bands
> Upon the eternal shore."

In conclusion, we are further reminded by this text that Christianity has solved a problem which men in all ages have vainly striven to solve; namely, *how to make life good, and death better.* The experience of very many is that life is bad, and death worse—

> "And makes them rather bear those ills they have,
> Than fly to others that they know not of."

Others, again, find life tolerably good and comfortable, but they dread the thought of dying, and strive to banish it from their minds as much as possible. But such is not the path of true wisdom, and is only staving off the evil day for a time. Death *must*, sooner or later, enter as a great reality into our history, and there can be no true composure nor happiness in life, except it be fairly faced and prepared for, and deprived of its terror and sting. There is no discharge in this warfare, save by being cut down and carried off the field. Only two men ever leaped the ditch into which all men fall. And it is our wisdom therefore to "consider our latter end," and to come, if possible, to look upon it as "*gain.*" And it is not impossible. The faith of Christ can effect this. Let us be washed in His blood, and be filled with His Spirit, and the fear of death shall be dissolved. The power of the world to come, the power of an endless life, the things laid up for them that love God, will work in us such a distaste for all sinful pleasure, and such a longing for the home and the society of the bright and holy, that we shall die to this present world, and having our conversation in heaven, and our hearts there also, death to us will be gain, for it will unveil to us the full beatific vision of God and of the Lamb. Amen.

IV.

THE TERCENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF KNOX.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."
Ps. cxvi. 15.

IT will, I suppose, my friends, be readily admitted among us, that what is "*precious*" in God's sight ought to be precious in ours, who are His professed servants and worshippers. And purposing, as I do, to speak to you to-day of the "*death*" of one whom I verily believe to have been one of God's saints, and in whose sight that death is precious, I trust that the task laid upon me may prove both interesting and profitable to us all.

On this very day three hundred years ago, there went forth over Scotland the same melancholy announcement which David made on the death of Abner, "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" (2 Sam. iii. 38.) On this 24th day of November, 1572, John Knox, the apostle of the Scottish Reformation, expired, in that quaint old tenement that every visitor to Edinburgh is familiar with, standing at the head of the "Nether Bow," and which some friends, interested in preserving relics of the Reformation times, were at pains some years ago to prevent being swept away by the tide of modern improvements, and so got one of our Free Churches (a mission church) built alongside of it as a shelter and protection to it, as much as to say, "We will stand or fall

together." And it has appeared a wise and proper thing, in the judgment of the last General Assembly of our Church, that this day should not be allowed to pass without an attempt being made to refresh the memories of all our people respecting the inestimable services to evangelical doctrine and civil liberty rendered by our illustrious countryman; and to call upon them all to render thanks to God anew for the blessings which have flowed to this land and to the world through our reformation from popish darkness and tyranny. And I, for one, fully concur in our Church's wisdom in this appointment, and desire to contribute my humble quota to the carrying out of her intention. We have had centenary celebrations recently in connection with our national poet and national novelist, Burns and Scott, and we do not begrudge the honours paid to them. But it will become us, and would bode ill for our future, if, when an opportunity offered, we were to refuse to celebrate the memory of our great national reformer, and who has, I will be bold to affirm, conferred more lasting and substantial benefits on his country than all our poets and literary celebrities put together. And no more appropriate sphere presents itself for this than the Christian pulpit—that pulpit which Knox did so much to erect in our midst, and which proved in his own hands such a formidable weapon against the strongholds of error and ignorance.

If it were intended that, by anything we say on this subject, we should be only glorifying *man*, I, for one, would refuse to prostitute this place to any such object. But we regard *any man*, in the great work of reformation, as only God's instrument, raised up to do God's work, and to minister to the true church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood; so that, in all we purpose saying, it is really GOD we glorify, and not man. It is the power of His grace which we admire, as manifested in the

human agent; as we witness it, *e.g.*, in the life and labours of Paul, and who, like every true worker in God's vineyard, gave all the glory to God Himself, saying, "By the grace of God I am what I am." And yet we do not demur, and are not ashamed to recount from this place the names and achievements of those whom God has raised up at sundry times to be the leaders and counsellors of His church, as Moses was to Israel of old; for hath not God Himself declared that "the righteous shall be held in everlasting remembrance"? And who shall condemn us when we try to give effect to that prediction in any well-marked instance? But before treating of the special subject now indicated, I should like to provide a Scriptural basis for it, by a brief exposition of this text, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

The idea of *preciousness* is here coupled with death—a startling conjunction surely in the estimation of worldly people, who never connect death except with what is gloomy and repulsive. But God, who Himself cannot die, is here described as contemplating with pleasure the deaths of His own people: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." And we have evidence of these people themselves regarding death with similar sentiments. "I have a desire," said Paul, "to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. xiv. 13).

But it is not death *as death* which is in either case the object delighted in. It is death as a *means to an end.* In God's case it is death as gathering His people to Himself, and in His people's case it is death as sending them home to Jesus. Death in itself can be no object of complacency or pleasure to either God or man. "I have no pleasure,"

saith the Lord, "in the death of him that dieth." And Paul spoke the sentiment of all believers when, contemplating death in the abstract, he said, "*Not that we would be unclothed*, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." Death is the wages of sin—the most outstanding evidence that God has been insulted and man accursed. And death, as death, can never be contemplated by either God or man in any other light than that of an enemy; and so the Scriptures regard it. "The last *enemy* that shall be destroyed is death."

But by reason of death's accompaniments and results in the case of the righteous, both they and their heavenly Father can speak of it as "precious," and a "thing to be desired." In our text death is looked at from God's side: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." And I may here enumerate, without enlarging upon them, some of the reasons which make the death of His saints precious in the sight of the Lord.

Every such death evinces the truth of our holy religion, and the power of Divine grace.

Men may live hypocrites, but they seldom die such. Death tries every man's work, of what sort it is. All shams and unrealities quail before the king of terrors. And what sustains and cheers the soul then, what death cannot kill nor shake, is acknowledged by all men to be real and genuine, or to have at least stood the severest possible test. And very many can testify how that they were first made to think seriously, and to think favourably of religion, by witnessing how some child of God was wondrously sustained and comforted on a bed of languishing and death. This was very marked during the last illness and death of Knox himself, as may be read at length in his life. Many visited him, and were more confirmed in the truth of the Gospel by the way in which they saw it to be supporting himself, than by

the powerful arguments they had heard from him in his most vigorous days. To a number of them gathered about his bed a little before he died, he addressed these words: "Oh, serve the Lord in fear, and death shall not be terrib'e to you! Nay, blessed shall death be to those who have felt the power of the death of the only begotten Son of God."

The death of a saint is precious in God's sight for this other reason, that it gives Christ to see somewhat more of the travail of His soul.

An addition is thereby made to the family above; the number of the elect is one nearer completion; the angels who rejoiced at the *beginning* of the work doubly rejoice at the completion of it; another jewel is added to the Redeemer's many crowns; a sensible increment is made to the sum of holiness, and the kingdom of darkness is proportionately weakened and overthrown; and precious therefore in the sight of the Lord is the death of a saint.

The only other reason I mention is that the death of a saint is precious in God's sight because of the useful lessons it is fitted to read to His Church on earth.

For example, it should excite *gratitude* to God for having bestowed such gifts and graces on His departed servant, as made him such an honoured instrument for good in his day and generation. And again, it should incite those who still remain to *abound more and more* in the work of the Lord, and be found faithful unto death, and so die the death of the righteous, and have their latter end like his. And further, it should teach the Church that while thankful for such distinguished gifts and graces as God has bestowed on His servants, she should rise beyond all creature instruments to God Himself, as her only true refuge and strength. "The battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chron. xx. 15). "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever?" It is well to be taught that no man is indispen-

sable to God, or to His cause. Champion after champion falls in the high places of the field, and the enemy exults, as if now they must surely win. But the battle is God's. And as quickly as one falls, another is raised up to fill the breach, and is seen to be better suited to the new exigencies of the case than the one who went before. And thus shall it go on till God hath set righteousness in the earth, and the isles shall wait for His law.

All these points, did time permit, might be abundantly illustrated out of the life-story of the illustrious servant of God, whom in His providence we are called upon to remember this day. But I cannot go into historical details, and must refer you to the brief outline of his life and labours put into your hand last Sabbath; and, better still, to McCrie's admirable "Life of Knox," which ought to be in every Protestant and Presbyterian family, or to Howie's memoir in "The Scots Worthies," and to which perhaps the most of you have readier access. There are, however, two or three aspects of Knox's work, which modern events give special significance to, and to these I would now briefly direct your attention. And—

I. I would bid you call to mind the *thoroughness* of the reformation which took shape under the hand of Knox. No relic of the popish system was left, but was cut up and cast out, root and branch.

In the very first sermon that Knox preached, in the parish church of St. Andrews, in 1547, he boldly declared the Church of Rome to be Antichrist, to be incurably bad, and that there was no use wasting time trying to improve her, as the manner of some was; but that she must be *wholly abolished*, and the Church of Christ erected in her place, and out of no other materials than what the Word of God supplies. That was the position on which he resolutely set

down his foot from the very first, and he never swerved from it by a single hair's breadth. And the consequence was, that there rose up in Scotland a Church differing in many marked respects from all her sister churches of the Reformation. In England, for example, the reformers were of the timid and temporizing order, afraid to lay the axe to the root of the tree, as Knox was doing; and contented themselves with lopping off the most conspicuous of popish abuses, but retaining as much of the condemned system as was judged to be at all compatible with the reformed doctrines. And time, which tries all things, has shown, and *will show* still further, who acted the wisest and most consistent part. It is common, indeed, to hear the thoroughness of Knox's work imputed to him as a fault, and our whole external aspect as Protestants is declared to be disfigured by it. We are twitted about the baldness and unattractiveness of our public worship—the tastelessness of our ecclesiastical buildings, and their internal appointments—the poverty of our ceremonial, if ceremonial it can be called. And Knox is pictured, by these critics, as a fierce and gloomy fanatic, ranging the country like a Goth or a Vandal, overturning altars, defacing cathedrals and abbeys, and conducting himself generally in a rude and domineering manner to all the most cultivated and amiable people in the land. We are not careful to reply to these charges. Time has replied to them pretty well already, and will have yet more to say about them. The friends of evangelical truth in England may well regret, as they are doing, that the Reformation there did not partake somewhat of Knox's thoroughness. For what has been the result? The Papacy has long laid hold on the English Church as the very best instrument, made ready to its hands, for undoing the Reformation, and for bringing back the old superstitions and idolatries. And you know with what astounding suc-

cess. The work has now progressed to this extent, as shown by the recent "Bennet judgment," as it is called, that one may hold and teach the doctrine of transubstantiation and the mass in the pulpits of the Church of England, and have the law on his side. And I, for one, must hold that a church which has come to tolerate the grand distinctive doctrine of the Papacy, the sacrifice of the mass, has forfeited all title to be called a *Protestant* church. Let us be thankful, then, that our own Reformation was so thoroughly accomplished at first, and that, if popery do rise to the ascendant among us again, it will not mount by steps, which our reformers unguardedly left ready for its feet.

II. A second thing which ought not to be overlooked in estimating the services of Knox to his country and the world is the stand which he was the first to take in this country in regard to *civil liberty*.

He firmly believed that religious liberty would prove a delusion, and of very brief continuance, if civil liberty were not conjoined with it, and made the bulwarks of it; and he strove, therefore, as strenuously against *kingly* usurpation as against popish usurpation, and that not as a politician, but as a Christian.

When charged with entertaining disloyal sentiments in the presence of Queen Mary, it being meant thereby that he had not desisted, at the queen's bidding, from opposing her popish plots, he retorted that the disloyalty had been on the queen's part, and not on his; and there and then he proferred an exposition of the royal prerogative, which sounded as rank treason in the ears which heard it then, but which sounds very differently in our ears at this time of day. He said that "All power is founded on a compact, expressed or understood, between the rulers and the ruled,

and that no one has either divine or human right to govern, save in accordance with the will of the people and the law of God." That was bold language to hold in the royal presence, and in the midst of courtiers who held by

> "The right divine of kings to govern wrong;"

and if it had not been that, as in the case of one greater than Knox, "*they feared the people*," his career would then have summarily terminated in his blood. But these sentiments, so shocking and treasonable *then*, are now the foundation of the British Constitution, and of all free constitutions the world over. And let it not be forgotten that the man who first openly avowed and advocated them on Scottish soil was Knox.

Here, perhaps, is the proper place to take notice of the fact that some writers, having ulterior objects to serve, of a reactionary and unpatriotic character, have attempted to fasten upon Knox the charge of extreme coarseness and rudeness in connection with what passed between him and this ill-starred Scottish queen; but the clearest historical evidence, coming to us from eye-witnesses of the interview, disproves the charge, and exhibits Knox as a thorough Christian gentleman, as well as a Christian soldier, posted to defend the faith in the highest place in the field. Some creatures, whom it passes us to comprehend, are so much the sycophants of royalty and of great people generally, that for a flattering word or a smile they are ready to send all principle "whistling down the wind," and to do whatever dirty work is required at their hands. But no unison had Knox with these. When his Master's honour was concerned, and his Master's message to be declared, he was the "*Lyon king-at-arms*," sounding a clarion blast that made the "welkin" ring, and was as unmoved by either cajolery or threatening, as the Bass Rock or Arthur Seat. We concede it, and concede it thankfully, that he was plain and outspoken

to Mary, and told her things that made her royal ears tingle; but we have yet to learn that there is any discourtesy in speaking the truth where it is imperatively demanded of us so to do; and never was it more imperatively demanded than in the instance in question. The success or ruin of the Reformation hinged upon it. The Reformation had been formally accomplished in Scotland in the way that Knox desired, and had been ratified by the estates of the realm. But the advent of Mary to the throne—a bigoted Papist, bound hand and foot to the priesthood, inspired the popish party at home and abroad with new courage. Nor did they despair of seeing the whole work overthrown through her means, while they carefully tutored her in the part they made her play. Knox was well apprised of the game that was afoot, and for him to have yielded to the prayers and tears of the queen, so lavishly and so hypocritically showered upon him, would have been to have re-enacted the part of Judas, and to have stultified and recanted his whole life-work. They did not know their man, but he made them know him; and they discovered, to the discomfiture of all their evil designs, the truth of the Regent Murray's exclamation, as they lowered Knox's body into the grave, "Here lies he that never feared the face of man;" and he might have added, "Nor face of woman either."

If the truth were told, Knox was Mary's best and truest friend. Very different would have been her fate, had she followed the counsels which he so affectionately and solemnly pressed upon her both by word and by writing. Her memory would have been cherished by us in a very different way from what it is; and we should have been spared the contemplation of her tragic end. That fair head would have never rolled upon the scaffold in the hall of Fotheringhay Castle, nor her royal blood been "lapped by a dog," like another Jezebel.

It is accounted a great hit now-a-days to be able to say of any one that he is *intolerant*, and without any reference as to what he is intolerant of. I suppose Jesus Himself will be thought encouraging intolerance when He commended the church of Ephesus in the words, "*Thou canst not bear them which are evil.*" We admit that Knox was intolerant—fiercely intolerant, if you will—but before we acknowledge anything blameworthy in that, we must insist on a very different exposition of toleration from what suits the latitudinarianism so much in vogue in the present day. I cannot here discuss the proper sphere and exercise of toleration. But I would just remind you that we are sent into this world to do something more than tolerate, even to resist and to overcome whatever is evil; and that was the fashion of Knox's intolerance—uncompromising opposition to the most gigantic system of lies and imposture which has ever disgraced God's earth.

III. A third thing specially requiring to be remembered on this occasion is the views which Knox advocated, and strove to give effect to, in regard to *education.*

He held it to be the duty of the State to see that every child received a sound education, and that the State provide the means for the same. He further held that it must not be left to the people themselves, or to the people's "ain fantasie," as he expressed it, to avail themselves or not, as they chose, of the educational provisions, but that they shall be *compulsory*, and be looked upon as indispensable to rulers rightly discharging their duty to the governed.* And to carry out these views he submitted to the Scottish Parliament a scheme for planting schools of various gradations—from

* It must form part of the compact between them, that they, the rulers, will not take in hand to govern an ignorant and uneducated people.

infant schools up to universities—a scheme moreover which was self-expansive, so as to keep pace with any growth of the people, and which would place the very highest education within the reach of the poorest in the land. And he showed moreover that there were funds enough to carry out his scheme, if the confiscated popish revenues were applied to that object. But avarice sadly curtailed the reformer's plans. The nobles were intent on securing the popish revenues for themselves, as the price of their adherence to the new order of things. And Knox had to content himself with the parochial system, so admirable as far as it went, and which has done so much service to the country, but which the country has long outgrown, as Knox said it would, and has had to depend for many years, for the greater portion of its education, on voluntary and random effort. And, curiously enough, it is only in this very year, which witnesses the 300th anniversary of Knox's death, that the country has obtained the scheme which he so long ago devised, and which we should have had from the beginning, had not the greed and plundering propensities of the nobility stopped the way. And now, since it has at last been obtained, let us be careful to place the practical carrying of it out into the hands of men imbued with somewhat of Knox's enlarged and devout and patriotic spirit. And may we not hope that this day's recurrence to his name and doings, all over the land, will assist in rekindling that spirit in those who will be speedily called upon to discharge this most responsible trust?

IV. The fourth and only other benefit which I mention as conferred upon us of God through Knox, and which I regard as the greatest of all when rightly weighed, is that it is mainly owing to him that our *Church policy is Presbyterian, and our theology Calvinistic.*

This, of course, will recommend itself only to those who

are both Presbyterians and Calvinists, and I am not now going to discuss the merits of rival systems either of Church government or Christian doctrine. But I simply say that whatever excellencies you may consider to belong to our Church government and form of doctrine, we owe them mainly to Knox. In his banishment for the truth's sake, the Lord led him to Geneva, where for more than two years he enjoyed the uninterrupted fellowship of Calvin, whom I regard, among uninspired men, as the greatest master of Divine truth that has ever appeared in the world; and it was at the feet of that greatest master in Israel where he was fully equipped with those views of Divine truth which it became his life work to inculcate upon Christians. Many, I am aware, will join with us in extolling Knox as a demolisher of idolatry and superstition, as a champion of civil and religious liberty, and as a warm friend of education, who yet look coldly on him as a theologian and a steward of God's mysteries. But it was in that department that he served God and his country best. All his other battles he regarded as being only with the enemy's outposts, and what he was *principally* set upon was the slaying of the heart's enmity to God; and the weapons of his warfare were the very same as Paul handled, and which Calvin had cleansed from the rust of centuries, even the gospel of the grace of God in all its purity and all its power. And we should be paying but a sorry tribute to the memory of the apostle of our Scottish Reformation, did we not prize him chiefly for the part he took in restoring to us the pure evangel of Jesus Christ—the only way to eternal life through faith in the crucified One.

I must now bring these remarks to a close.

In the Reformation of the sixteenth century there were, as in the army of David, "*three mighties*" (1 Chron. xi. 12)

—Luther, Calvin, and Knox; and it is no small distinction for our country that one of the "three mighties" belonged to us. And while it is becoming that all the towns and parishes of our land should this day refresh their memories with how great things the Lord did for us by his hand, it is, I think, peculiarly fitting that we in *this town* should not be behind in this work. When in the very thick of the fight, the great reformer came to our town, and spent the greater part of a week in it, in order that he might accept a challenge flung out by the Abbot of Crossreguel to any or all the Reformers to come and publicly discuss with him the points at issue. For three days the disputation was held in that old tenement in the Back Vennel, so well known to you. And I never pass that narrow flight of stone steps, which was then the public entrance to the room in which the meetings took place, without fancying I see the great man ascending to his daily task of demolishing the abbot's learning and logic. But all the actors in these scenes have long since passed away. The abbot is gone, and but for his connection with Knox, his name would have perished too. And his abbey is a crumbling ruin. But Knox's name shall be held in everlasting remembrance, and his work abides and ever grows, and all the ends of the earth have shared in its blessings. The battle he fought and won was bigger with issues than either that which Wallace fought at Stirling, or Bruce at Bannockburn. And let us see that we hold fast the fruits of his victory. And the call to hold them fast is not out of place; for many and subtle influences are at work, both of a popish and infidel kind, to despoil us of our dearly won liberties. But they are the principles of eternal truth, and can never perish. As an example of the vicissitudes which have beset them, it is worth noting that this is *the very first occasion* since Knox's death that any

centenary celebration of it could take place on anything like a national scale, or was possible even in this little town. At the first centenary of his death (1672), Presbyterianism was proscribed, and prelacy in the process of being forced upon the country. Cargill might steal as near our town as Cargillstone, or Pedan as near as Guiletree-hill, but no Presbyterian that year could stand up in Maybole, and speak approvingly of Knox. And then at the next centenary (1772), we find ourselves in the coldest depths of the reign of Moderatism, when, except in the case of a handful here and there, the principles and contendings of the Reformers were treated with indifference or contempt. And nowhere was the chilly breath of Moderatism more fatally felt than in this very town and country-side. This is really the first centenary occasion since the death of Knox that anything like a national recognition of him could be attempted. What may be the state of matters at the next centenary (1972) is entirely beyond our ken. But let us remember this, that in that long chain of years to come we are a *link*, and the *commencing* link, and what it may be at the end may depend much on the part we play *now*. Let the reformed doctrines be the staple of our souls' life, let the zeal and self-sacrifice of the Reformers be copied and practised by us, and we shall leave our mark somewhere—"footprints on the sands of time," which some weary pilgrim will see and take courage, and though dead we shall yet speak, and will contribute another illustration to the text, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." Amen.

V.

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TRUE PROGRESS.

"I press toward the mark."—PHIL. iii. 14.

I NEED not occupy your time in explaining the imagery under which the Apostle is speaking of himself here. It is the same which he so frequently draws upon in other parts of his writings, and even more elaborately than here (*e.g.*, 1 Cor. ix. 24—27); namely, the athletic contests which figured so largely in the social life of the ancient Greeks. Here it is the race which is before his mind, and in that attitude and exercise, pertaining to the body, he saw a fit image of how his spirit was constantly exercised in regard to spiritual and eternal realities: "I press toward the mark." The Apostle, as he comes before us here, is emphatically a man of progress; and that should be a high recommendation to him among the people of our time; for "Progress" is a name to conjure with—the great watch-word and rallying cry of our day. Everything is challenged and reviewed and judged in the name of progress. There is a saying that one had as well be out of the world as out of the fashion. And that is the modern fashion, to be disciples of progress. And not to display a banner in that name is to be branded as a "Reactionist," one of the most terrible words out, and amounting to something like a sentence of banishment from all the great thoroughfares of human activity and influence. But we have no wish to be

out of the fashion in this respect, and we would think it a wicked thing indeed in any one to declare himself an enemy of progress as such. Progress has been the Divine law in everything from the beginning, the law by which the Creator has shaped His own course, and by which we, as individuals and as citizens, are bound to shape ours.

But we must not be too easily led, or misled, by a mere name; for just as "it is not all gold that glitters," and as "they are not all Israel who are called Israel," so neither is that always progress which is called progress; nor are they always men of progress who most loudly proclaim themselves to be such. And we see much around us, in the present day, extolled as progress, but which comes out very defective when weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, and measured with the measuring line of God's Word.

The fundamental law of progress, as it relates to man, and without compliance with which any attempt in that direction will speedily undo itself, is that it shall be the *whole* man that is raised—body, soul, and spirit, head and heart together—man socially, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. If that be not done, we shall lose our pains. You can fancy men trying to lift a block of stone by raising it up at one or two corners. It just falls over on the other side, because the leverage was not applied at a sufficient number of points. And such will be the end of all experiments to raise man, if any important division of his nature be left out, and especially if you leave out his moral and spiritual nature. We are asked to look at the immense strides which have been taken, in every kind of material comfort and convenience, during the last hundred years—the development of commerce, the improvement in arts and manufactures, the multiplying of the means of locomotion, and hundreds of such-like things—and it is said to us, "Behold the progress!" Yes, we reply, we own the

progress. But progress in what? Not in man himself, but only in his material surroundings, and all that you point us to may and do consist with his actually degenerating, in all the noblest qualities of his nature; with all his accomplishments, still selfish, brutal, cruel, and lustful; civilized to the highest degree, but with the savage lurk still directly underneath his flimsy outward adorning. Speaking as I was a little while ago about raising a block of stone by one force applied at only one point, it is possible only when the force is directly under the centre of gravity. And there is one force that can exalt the whole man, and it is that which is applied at the centre of his being; the force which acts upon his heart; the force put forth by the Gospel of Christ; the power of faith. That of itself will ensure true progress, though everything else be withheld. But we have no wish to withhold any force, of a healthful and elevating tendency, applied to any part of his being. We only wish to expose the folly and wickedness of excluding from our plans of progress the *one force* which is more potent than all the others taken together, and without which they can do nothing to the purpose, and nothing which will endure.

What we need, then, is progress after the type of Paul's; progress in spirit-power, in heavenly illumination, in faith and love and Christ-likeness. That was what Paul pressed after; and the deepest secret of all personal and family and national prosperity and greatness is to make progress along the same line. That is the grand trunk line, to take an illustration from our material progress. All else are but branch lines, along which many run up and down, making plenty of motion and stir, but making no progress towards the celestial goal and its immortal prize.

In discoursing for a little on the Apostle as a hero of the best and highest progress, I remark—

I. That we do not take up the Apostle here at the *commencement* of his career. He is *in transitu*, as it were; in fact, as it can be shown, very near the close of his course. All of his life contained in the book of the Acts was now over, and in a short space he would be able to say, "I have finished my course."

To get at the commencement of what we see him engaged upon here, we have to go back twenty-six years, when the opening of his eyes, by the mission of Ananias, was attended by the advent of a yet pleasanter light than the light of the sun; the hour when, as a poor undone and perishing sinner, he apprehended the Jesus whom he had been persecuting as his Divine and Almighty Saviour. And the same must be the commencement of the Christian course for every one of us. We enter on it through the faith of Jesus, and in no other way. That is the only way to strive lawfully in this race which is set before us. But believing in Jesus is only the entrance to the course, at the utmost only *starting* in the race, although all the other steps are necessarily included in that *first* step. The *Author* of faith will be the *finisher* of it. But from the moment of faith's birth in the soul there stretches onward a career of progress in everything pure, and lovely, and honest, and of good report.

A class of people, Antinomians, have not been unknown in the Christian Church, and are still known, though not now congregated into distinct sects; people who would like to believe that the whole Christian enterprise terminates in first believing, in closing with the Gospel offer. All further aspirations and efforts and movements they deem to be superfluous, and to be only wearying themselves in vain. They fancy that by accepting the one great sacrifice they have for ever compounded with heaven, and are rid of any such wearisome and painful task as maintaining

a daily struggle with sin and temptation. They have undergone the great pang of repentance, as they imagine, and rejoiced in the unspeakable joy of Christ's salvation, and now they have nothing more to do. Christ's merits will fill up all the rest. They can now lie on their oars, and take their ease, and even their indulgence; for if they sin now, it is no longer they that do it, but sin that dwelleth in them; and sin will be judged, but not they personally.

It is plain that the Apostle was not one of these. After believing, he saw that he had a race to run, a probation to go through, a yet higher salvation to work out, and he accepted and diligently persevered in it, and to the last is heard exclaiming, "I press toward the mark."

Now, so important is this progress in the life of faith and holiness, that without it there is absolutely no evidence that the Divine life has been entered upon at all. It is needed not merely for assurance, but even for the existence of the faintest rational hope of being saved. We are very far from asserting that this progress is always discernible, or is equally maintained from the moment of conversion. It cannot be measured step by step, nor is it subject to any known rules. All that we can say is, that, *on the whole*, from the moment of true conversion the movements of the soul are all in one direction, in the direction of God and holiness. But it is only *upon the whole*. Many stagnations and retrogressions are discernible; but out of these come periods of quickening and redoubled energy; so that, taken *on the whole*, and estimated at periods of time considerably apart, it is manifest that there is progress, a growth in grace, an advance towards the mark. It may be compared to the rising tide. Every wave recedes, and some do not reach so high as the one preceding; but, on the whole, the flood is advancing until the high tide mark is attained. And so every true believer in Christ

shall reach the mark. In whom the good work is begun' it will be finished. Like Gideon's soldiers, he may be ofttimes faint, but he will yet persevere, and shall win the prize.

II. Let us consider the means which the Holy Spirit employs in quickening and sustaining the soul in its heavenward progress. It is by setting before it "*the mark.*" It was so in Paul's case. He pressed forward because "*the mark*" was full in view—"I press *toward the mark.*"

The mark in the race was the winning-post, and on which was hung up the prize for the victor, the laurel crown, the corruptible and fading crown that the Apostle refers to on other occasions, but which, in the Christian's case, is what he calls here "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," and which he declares in another place to be an "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven."

It was, then, the immortal life of the Gospel promise, and which is only entered upon at the second advent of Jesus and the resurrection of His saints, that the Apostle kept full in view, and which stimulated him to press on to the end, as he expressly declares (ver. 11), "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead," or, as it is in the original, "the resurrection *from among the dead*," *i.e.*, the resurrection of the saints; for "the dead in Christ shall rise first." In other words, it was "*hope*" that kept the Apostle awake and active. Hope looks forward, and claims its inheritance in the future. And it is in accordance with Scripture to say that "we are saved by hope" (Rom. viii.). The Christian is the subject of a double salvation. He is twice saved. He is saved (1) from the guilt and eternal punishment of sin, and that salvation is by *faith*. But (2) he needs to be saved from the power

and pollution of sin, and he is so saved mainly by hope —not by hope entirely, but by faith and hope combined, *but mainly by hope.* "He that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself." The prize of his high calling in Christ attracts and entrances his gaze, and it is thus that he escapes the corruptions that are in the world through lust. By the first salvation he is put upon the course, and by the second he runs to the end. The Apostle works out this latter salvation under the power of hope when he says, "I press toward the mark."

III. Let us be fully sensible of the benefits of having such a mark in view.

Every one's life is benefited by having an object clear in view, even though it be infinitely below that which was before the Apostle, be it only to excel in some walk of life, commerce, science, etc. Most people go through life as if their eyes were bandaged. They simply grope their way from year to year, and they know of nothing in particular that they are living for; they just take things as they come, and try to keep their minds easy. Well, their lives will not be attuned in a very lofty key or noble strain. They will do little good, make no impression on their time and neighbourhood, and can entertain but slender hopes of receiving on the Great Day the good commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Having a mark to look at, especially the mark before the Apostle—the prize of the high calling in Christ—is fitted to exert these influences upon us.

1. It will lend *earnestness* in life. "I *press*," says the Apostle, and no more striking figure of earnestness can we imagine than that of the racer *pressing* toward the mark. A lack of earnestness is the blight which most palpably

lies upon us. The best of us are only half awake. We do not look as if we believed what we profess. We act as if religion were only an antiquated ceremony, and heaven and hell no better than fables of the old pagan mythology. We have earnestness enough for other things (and ofttimes a great deal too much), for business, for politics, for social pleasures; but in religion we are cold and motionless like the man of the graveyard, or as if Medusa's head had turned on us, and made us stone. But it would be otherwise if the "mark" were kept steadily in view, if the Gospel inheritance were a reality in our eyes, and if we were persuaded that we have a place prepared for us in the home of many mansions. Life would thrill with earnestness.

2. Another effect of having this mark full before us would be to give *directness* or singleness of aim to our lives.

The Apostle was not given to making excursions to the right hand or to the left. He took the straightest, the shortest cut. He pressed toward the mark. But one idea and one aim possessed him, and you could see it in all his words and actions.

Most people's lives are merely bundles of inconsistencies, you never know when you have them nor have them not. What they say and do to-day, they will be ready to unsay and undo to-morrow. They lack all coherence and stability. And you will find that it is owing to their having no grand controlling principle of life. They are creatures of circumstances, the sport of every wind that blows. The prize of the high calling set full in their view would work such a revolution in them, that you would hardly know them. Directness, simplicity, straightforwardness, would then take the place of the evasiveness, the duplicity, the uncertainty, which were such conspicuous features in their character before. I read lately of an experiment made by

VI.

THE WIDOW'S MITE.

"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she, of her want, did cast in all that she had, even all her living."—MARK xii. 41—44.

THERE are few incidents in our Lord's life which more fully display the calm sublimity of His divine majesty than the one we have now read. Rightly to appreciate it we must take into view the circumstances in which it took place.

Our Lord was paying His *last* visit to the temple, and a few minutes before the occurrence of this incident He had been mercilessly exposing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, and had pronounced upon them a sentence of "greater damnation" than upon other sinners. And apparently to show that His wrath was not the "wrath of man," and that it was not accompanied by any storm or perturbation in His own mind, but that all within Him was calm and unruffled, as it befits the Divine mind to be, even in the moment of fiercest wrath, He sat still awhile to contemplate the poor widow, and to place an imperishable diadem of honour upon her brow. The incident falls upon

us like a bright and warm sunbeam, bursting through the storm-cloud.

He was just in the act of quitting the temple for ever, and He seems to linger on the threshold, as if loath to depart, and as if anxious for some opportunity to make His last utterance a word of peace and blessing; and the pious widow supplied it. Upon the altar of her heart the omniscient Saviour descried the last dying embers of the fire of God in that house, and He paused to notice it, and to pay it homage. We read in French history of one of their kings who, being deposed and driven from his palace by revolutionary violence, paused on the lowest step of the entrance to bestow his parting blessing on a little child of one of his domestics, who happened to be playing there; and it is recorded as an instance of magnanimity and self-possession worthy of a king; and, in the incident before us, we have somewhat akin to it. Christ had been deposed in His own house, and cast out of it as unworthy to appear there. He had come to His own, and His own received Him not. But He quits the house without anger or exasperation, and discloses the serenity and dignity of His own soul by tarrying at the entrance to recognize and bless a poor widow. His eye was ever open to the true sublime; and, in no circumstances, could it elude Him. While He was sitting over against the treasury, searching out the few grains of the spiritual and the true from the bushels of chaff which were pouring past Him into the temple, His disciples, as we learn from the opening verse of the next chapter, had been engaged in surveying and admiring the architectural grandeur of the house itself. "One of His disciples saith unto Him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here." But the Saviour's interest had been concentrated on the living stones of the living temple; and one pious heart, beating beneath an exterior however

mean and poor, was an object of greater interest and sublimity to Him than all the creations of human art and genius. Oh that we would learn to search for our objects of greatest interest and worth in the region of the moral and the spiritual—in the hidden man of the heart—rather than among the garish vanities of the outward and material!

But, apart altogether from the insights, which the narrative is fitted to afford us, into the sublime peace and dignity of the Saviour's character, arising out of a consideration of its surroundings—the circumstances in which it occurred—there is enough in the narrative itself to make it both interesting and instructive to us. From the fact, specially noted in ver. 43, that He "called His disciples unto Him," we are to regard what our Lord said and did on this occasion as being peculiarly an *official* act, intended for the instruction of His Church in all ages. And may the Holy Ghost dispose our hearts to suffer the word of exhortation it is designed to speak to us! Let us—

I. *Consider some of the things which the incident reveals respecting Christ Himself.*

1. *It presents Him to us as the omniscient searcher of hearts.*

He had just been uncovering to the light of day the hidden wickedness of the scribes and Pharisees, and now He does the same for the hidden worth of the poor widow. The evil and the good are both alike naked to His eye; and He did then, upon a small scale, what He will do in regard to the whole race on the great day of account. And how comforting it is now to God's children, misrepresented and maligned by the world, or consigned to oblivion and neglect, to reflect that there is One who knows them, and who will not overlook them; One who will judge righteous judgment between them and their enemies, and who will yet summon, not His disciples merely, but all

men and angels, that He may "bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noonday" (Ps. xxxvii. 6).

2. *We see here by what a different standard Christ judges of men's actions from what they themselves judge by.*

"Man looketh upon the outward part, but God looketh upon the heart." Man judges the heart by the outward deeds, and no other way is available to him—"By their fruits shall ye know them." But with God it is the very opposite; He judges the deeds by the heart. He regards the motives by which we are actuated far more than the works themselves; and they are little or great, good or bad, in His sight, according to the faith and love and simplicity of heart by which we are prompted. The poor widow's offering was rated by Him, not at its marketable value, in which view it was very despicable, but according to the purity of her motives in making it; and, according to that standard, it was declared to outweigh all the other offerings of the rich and great. The Lord looks to what a man *is*, and not to what he *has*. "I am poor and needy and yet the Lord thinketh upon me."

Again, how comforting it is to God's poor people, who can give but very little of this world's wealth, when money is required for the Lord's service, to reflect that by doing what they can, and under the influence of right motives, they may really be giving the most of any, according to God's own standard of judging; and that at any rate, however little it be in man's estimation, it is an offering that He will not despise, nor forget in the day when He rewardeth every man according to his deeds.

3. And lastly, under this head, we are reminded of Christ that *His eyes are upon His treasury, and upon those who contribute to it.* "Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how people cast money into the treasury." And

His treasury is still within His view, and He is keenly watching what individuals and congregations and churches are doing for it. His eyes go to and fro upon the earth, and from His heavenly throne He is saying to every one of us, "I know thy works."

The Lord needs not us nor ours in order to propagate His Gospel, and to secure the accomplishment of His designs. Of the very stones of the ground, He assures us, He could raise up children to Abraham. But with the view of furthering our own moral and spiritual welfare, He has condescended to call us to His help against the mighty, and honoured us to be fellow-workers with Himself, by contributing of our substance and time and labour to help forward the final triumph of His cause. He is graciously pleased to accept these sacrifices, on our part, as evidences of how far the truth has acquired the ascendency over us.

The Lord holds His Church responsible for the diffusion of spiritual blessings in the world; and, under the present constitution of things, that can be done only through human instrumentalities, requiring the active and substantial aid of all the members of the Church. And it can be, therefore, no matter of indifference to Christ what we contribute to His cause, but a matter of the deepest moment, which He is keenly watching and keeping the record of; and in order to impress upon us how much importance He attaches to it, He chose one of the most solemn moments of His life to sit over against the treasury, and behold how the people cast money into it.

II. *But, secondly, let us consider some of the things which this incident reveals respecting ourselves.*

1. It shows us that our offerings to the Lord's treasury, in order to be acceptable to Him, must bear some decent proportion to what He has bestowed upon us.

"Many that were rich," we read here, "cast in much." But it was "out of their abundance," Christ observed, and very small in comparison with their entire possessions, and it looked very little therefore in His eyes. He neither praised nor blamed the gifts of the rich, but simply spoke of them as greatly out of proportion to what had been bestowed by God's providence upon them. And the widow's two mites were reckoned so large an offering because it was all the money she had—her "whole living" for that day at least.

Were this law of proportion rigorously carried out throughout the Church, there are many first that would be last, and many last that would be first. Some of the most munificent subscribers would be shown to be unworthy of the praises which are lavished upon them; and many of our poorest contributors would be advanced to the foremost rank in point of liberality and large-heartedness. And, moreover, if such a rule were acted upon, the Lord's treasury would soon be replenished to overflowing. Religion at present gets hardly the crumbs that fall from our tables —a mere pittance, ridiculously out of all proportion to the manner in which the Lord hath prospered us, and can be looked upon in no other light than as a caricature upon the Divine precept, "Freely ye have received, freely give."

2. Our offerings to the Lord's treasury, in order to be acceptable to Him, must be felt by us to involve a sacrifice.

In the widow's case it was very palpably so. She had nothing left to live upon for some time at least; and what made the large sums of the rich so insignificant in Christ's eyes was that they entailed no sacrifice. It was out of their "abundance" that they gave. They never felt it, any more than though they had not given it. It never required them to curtail themselves in a single comfort or

pleasure. They still rolled in luxury, and withheld from themselves nothing which their hearts desired.

It is one of the great advantages, in a spiritual point of view, belonging to straitened circumstances, that it enables us really to *sacrifice* for Christ far more easily than were we in a condition of greater affluence. And this is no small advantage. For what is it which makes it so hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven? Is not this one of the causes, at least, that an amount that would involve a real sacrifice to them would be so large that they could not find it in their hearts to give it? But Christ demands REAL SACRIFICES from all His disciples: "If any man will come after Me, let him DENY himself." And is there anything unreasonable in such a sacrificing Saviour insisting on having sacrificing disciples? Though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor. He sacrificed His life to save us. And shall we repudiate all idea of sacrifice from our service of Him? Can we do so, and yet have the face to call ourselves His followers?

3. But lastly, under this head, we are encouraged by this incident to look to liberality in the Lord's cause as a means of grace to ourselves.

Had this woman been impelled merely by *duty*, she would not have given what she did, for no law required her to give her *whole living*. She was under the influence of something even stronger than *duty*. She felt the *blessedness* of giving to the Lord, and knew that it would be returned to her in good measure, and in better coin than she gave.

And if we, my friends, take any lesser view of it than this, we really miss all the advantages of liberal giving. It is designed of God to be twice blessed. "It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes." We would never dream, with the heathen, of purchasing God's favour by our gifts, however costly, nor, with the papist, of establishing any

merit of our own. We renounce all methods of acceptance with God, save that which is brought to us by the Gospel of peace, the atoning work of Christ in His death and resurrection. We repudiate all price of our soul's salvation, save the precious blood of Christ. That is the price by which we are bought, and not with such corruptible things as silver and gold. Thus it stands with our being *justified.* But among the ways and means of *sanctifying* us, and making us meet for the kingdom, our own liberal giving of our substance for the furtherance of righteous ends holds no mean nor unimportant place. It may take rank with prayer, and study of the Scriptures, and other holy exercises. It is meant to be our schooling, in order to overcome the natural selfishness of our hearts. It is meant to perfect our love both to God and man, and to stir into lively exercise every sublime and generous emotion. In a word, it is the appointed means of exalting us to the practical likeness of God, for "God is love," and is always proving it by always *giving.* He is "the great Giver," and He invites us to give, that we may, in some measure, resemble Himself, and, in some measure, enter into His joy.

It is this view of the matter especially which should reconcile the ministers of the Gospel to use all proper means to stimulate the liberality of their people. They are thereby benefiting their people's souls. There are many thoughtless and careless persons, so ill-instructed in the things of the kingdom, that they look upon it as an exceedingly secular and improper thing for ministers to urge from the pulpit, on the Sabbath day, the claims of any religious enterprise requiring money. But if liberality be a *grace* of the Spirit, as it is expressly declared to be (2 Cor. viii. 7), it requires to be stirred up, and plied with proper motives from time to time, as much as any other grace, as much as faith, or love, or hope. And we know

that we are thereby *directly* promoting the best spiritual well-being of those to whom we minister; and all who are themselves spiritual will be the first to acknowledge it; and it will be an offence to none, except to those to whom the cross of Christ itself is an offence.

III. *In the third and last place, this incident reveals some lessons which the Church at large would do well to ponder.*

1. It shows us the value that God sets upon *littles*. The two mites would be despised that day by the elders who stood beside the treasury, but not so by Him who sat over against it, the Lord of the treasury; and His recognition of them has invested *littles* with a sacredness and a power which the Church has never neglected, except to her great detriment and loss.

Consider all the works of God, whether in nature or in grace, and you will perceive that *littles* are the order of the day with Him. The most stupendous of His works, the sublimest of His effects, are merely an aggregate of *littles*. Thus the children sing—

> "Little drops of water, little grains of sand,
> Make the boundless ocean and the beauteous land;
> And the little moments, humble though they be,
> Make the mighty ages of eternity."

Some of the largest mountains and islands on the globe are the product of the coral insect. And it is by the most insensible gradations and additions that the animal and vegetable kingdoms advance from microscopic dimensions to the goodly proportions with which we are familiar. And we can trace the same all through the regions of the intellectual, the moral, and the spiritual. The most useful discoveries in science have sprung from very insignificant beginnings, and have been perfected little by little. Character is but the effect of a vast congeries of *littles*. Life

is made up of little incidents, rather than of brilliant achievements. And it is mainly upon *littles* that the peace and comfort of our homes depend. So, again, the children sing—

> "Little deeds of kindness, little words of love,
> Make the earth an Eden, like the heaven above."

The teaching which is yet to transform the world is "Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." And the progress of the Divine life in the soul is like the passing from darkness to light by one pencil of rays following upon another, shining more and more unto the perfect day. And if the financial system of the Church overlook this great principle, on which God has erected all His most stupendous works, and is producing all His mightiest and most enduring effects, she is out of harmony alike with nature and with grace, and must break down in the fulfilment of her high mission. To strive after grand results by the patient operation of little agencies is truly God-like, and must be looked to as the secret of the Church's success. We are thankful for the large subscriptions of the liberal and wealthy few, but we must not depend upon them, else our career is brief. We must gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost. The Church now is infinitely more wealthy than in Apostolic days; and if every one were doing the little that God has put it in his power to do, what a lever for good would be at once placed in our hands, and by how many open doors might we enter in and occupy, in the Lord's name, while at present we can only stand afar off, and contemplate them with vain regrets!

2. And, finally, let the Church, through all her membership, learn from this incident that Christ will strictly reckon with her for all the wealth He has bestowed upon her.

The incident occurs in a very significant connection. It

is immediately followed by the prophecy of the Mount of Olives, in which Christ describes the end of this dispensation, and His return to judgment; and in the light of that coming judgment, in which this incident is presented to us, let all the professing followers of Christ consider the manner in which they are discharging their stewardship. He that sits over against the treasury, and takes note of our givings, will then be Judge, and we shall have to give account of our money transactions, not to deacons and collectors, but to Christ Himself.

But though, by the terrors of the Lord, we are at liberty to persuade men as to this matter, for some of the heaviest denunciations of Scripture are directed against them that "rob God," yet we would much rather prefer to see you stirred to take a lively interest in it by the sweet and winning voice of the Saviour's love, and your own sense of the honour and privilege conferred upon you.

"*If thou knewest the gift of God*," said Christ to the Samaritan woman; and if we knew that gift, as we ought to know it, and prized it as it deserves to be prized, we should need no arguments nor inducements to give, "as the Lord has prospered us," for the maintenance and propagation of His Gospel. We could not possibly take up as our own the Apostle's words, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me," without also saying with him, and acting with him in the spirit of his words, "We who live should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again." The heart's sentiment of every blood-bought child of God is that which is expressed by the hymn—

> "Were the whole realm of nature mine,
> That were a present far too small;
> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all." Amen.

VII.

IT IS FINISHED.

"It is finished."—JOHN xix. 30.

DURING the six terrible hours that the Saviour hung upon the cross He spake at intervals; and these utterances, amounting to *seven* in all, are generally known as "*The voices from the Cross.*" And it seems to me that it is by no mere accident that they amounted to exactly *seven*, that mystic number so often standing in Scripture as the symbol of completeness and perfection; for if these utterances be carefully examined and compared, and the results summed up, they will be found, I am satisfied, to contain a marvellous compendium of the whole doctrine of the cross, both as regards the nature of the work itself, and its relations to sinners. But that is an aspect of the matter into which I have no intention of entering at present. I confine myself to the one utterance now before us, and which was the sixth in order; for, though it stands the last here, we learn from another Evangelist (Luke xxiii. 46), that another immediately followed, namely, the words, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

"The words of dying *men*," says the great dramatist, "enforce attention," and surely much more the words of the dying *God-man*. And when, in addition to His dying utterance, we are to have celebrated, in our midst, the sacrament in which He is manifestly set forth as crucified,

methinks that the motives and incentives earnestly to attend to this word of Jesus, can hardly admit of being any further increased. And yet there is one consideration more, if more be needed, for giving all earnest heed to it, and it is that to understand it fully, and believe it truly, is *all that is needed to make us supremely happy.* It unrolls before our eyes "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God" in all its fulness and freeness: and to the ear of faith that word, "It is finished," sounds like the ringing of bells at eventide, summoning all the weary and heavy-laden to rest and peace. May the Spirit of all grace so bless them to our souls this day!

In treating this subject, I shall arrange the materials called up by it under three heads—

I. The lights cast by this utterance on Christ's work itself.

II. The respects in which Christ's work was then finished. And—

III. The ways in which the finishing of His work should affect us.

I. *The lights cast by this utterance on Christ's work itself.* And of these I shall look at *four.*

1. It exhibits it to us as a *great* work, a work of importance and dignity.

It is not of any ordinary or trifling act that we use the stately phrase, "It is finished." It would be sheer-bombast to say so in such a connection. That expression belongs to *weighty* work, to what we regard as something of an achievement to have got off our hands. And never was the expression, in this view of it, more worthily applied than in marking the completion of the work of redemption. What shall we call a "great" work, if that was not great? "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty."

And this redemption of a perishing world is the greatest and most marvellous of them all. "His tender mercy is over all His other works."

The Hebrew expression, corresponding to the one before us, and which concludes the twenty-second Psalm (and from which very likely our Lord took it), is the same that we have in Gen. ii. 3, and which records the fact of "the Lord God" *finishing* creation. And that voice from the cross, "It is finished," marked the termination of a work not a whit behind that from which the Lord God rested when He had made the heavens and the earth. Yea, we have God's own authority for regarding it as a yet greater work, both in its nature and issues, both as it relates to the unfolding of the Divine attributes, and as engaging infinitely more attention on the part of His intelligent universe. It has made known the manifold wisdom of God to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, in a way that no creative acts had ever done or ever can do. It unfolded the very *heart* of God, and revealed Him to be "*Love*" as well as "Light." Mariners, on the other side of the equator, look up at nights, and they see a constellation burning in the sky, with a glory surpassing all the rest. It is "the Southern Cross." And when advancing day has blotted out all other stars from the sky, that cross is still distinctly seen. And we know of a cross more glorious and more enduring still. And when yon heavens and all their host have been rolled away as a scroll, and changed as a garment, the cross of Calvary will shine with undiminished lustre before the eyes of the intelligent universe, attesting the greatness of the work finished.

2. The exclamation, "It is finished," implies that Christ's work was a *difficult* one. A work may be great, and yet not difficult. Creation was a *great* work, but not *difficult* to the Author of it. "He spake, and it was done. He com-

manded, and it stood fast." But Christ's work was both great and difficult; and who can imagine the feeling of infinite relief represented by that word, "It is finished"? It was the spent outburst of an unburdened heart. His human nature quailed before the difficulty of it: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But it could not pass, if His people were to be saved; and He would rather drink it to the dregs, and wring it out, than that one of them should perish. And now that the last drop has passed His lips; now that the justice of God is appeased; now that the darkness, which had veiled the earth during the three hours that He was consciously deserted of His Father, was clearing away, heralding the light and peace returning to His spirit; now that the tremendous task which the Father had given Him to do was accomplished; who shall blame Him if He give vent to the relief felt by crying, with a loud voice, "It is finished"?

3. This expression conveys the idea that Christ's work was a very *definite* one. He knew when it was done. It had a beginning, certain well-marked stages in the progress of it, and a clear and unmistakable termination. He often spake of His work as a something *prescribed, i.e.*, a something definite. He called it "My Father's business," "The work of Him that sent Me," "The work which Thou gavest Me to do." And the same thing is plainly implied in His very title of the Messiah or Christ of God, *i.e.*, God's Ambassador; for ambassadors who are sent on missions have always, you know, very definite instructions given them. He came on no hazy, ill-considered undertaking. He came to be the Mediator of a covenant which is well ordered in all things, and sure.

Now this is a view of Christ's work which the tendencies of our time require to give special prominence to; for unquestionably those tendencies are towards a vague and

indefinite theology, abounding in glowing panegyrics of the Divine mercy and goodness, but sadly deficient in clear and positive statements as to how a sinner is to be accepted of God. All is haziness and dreaminess, which may engage and delight the fancy so long as the soul is dead in trespasses and sins, and no crisis is upon it. But if happily it be aroused, and made to see its danger and wants in right earnest, to know what it must do to be saved, it can find no solid footing among these crude and ill-digested teachings; and happy for it if it betake itself to the old paths. We are sometimes twitted with our theology being hard and dry; but I submit that when solid footing and rest and repose are the things desiderated, hardness and dryness are no bad qualities, are infinitely preferable to shifting quicksands or treacherous quagmires. We glory in exhibiting the Saviour's work as definite in its *nature*, an atonement, a satisfaction to Divine justice; definite in its *objects*, God's elect, those whom the Father gave to Christ from everlasting; and definite in its *results*, making salvation not merely possible, but making it *certain* for all whom the Father had given Him.

And 4, and lastly, under this head, this expression, 'It is finished," implies that Christ's work was perfect.

This is perhaps the clearest proposition of all, and takes us to the very heart of the subject. What could the Saviour have meant by saying, "It is finished," unless that something was then perfected? A definite goal was reached in His mediatorial work, and all up to that point was perfect, and could never again be re-opened nor improved, without plainly contradicting that word, "It is finished." And Scripture leaves us in no ignorance of what was then perfected. The atonement was perfected. "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*" (Heb. x. 10). ONCE FOR ALL! never to be repeated.

"He needeth not daily to offer up sacrifice," for this He did "once for all." The Romanist teaches that Christ's sacrifice needs to be repeated, and *is* repeated every time the mass is celebrated. But such teaching we repudiate as dishonouring to Christ, and as opposed to the plainest scriptures. "It is finished." "He hath finished transgression, and made an end of sin." "By that one offering He hath *perfected* for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. x. 14).

And this brings me to speak—

II. *Of the respects in which Christ's work was then finished.* That His work was finished, in every view of it, was manifestly not the case; for His work is still in progress, and will not be absolutely finished till "the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound." Then "the mystery of God shall be *finished*" (Rev. x. 7); then shall the cope stone be put on the spiritual temple amid the universal shout of "Grace, grace unto it." There is a sense, indeed, in which Christ's work even, as a whole, *was finished* when He spoke that word, in the way in which it may be said a battle is finished. And the history of the late Franco-German war supplies an illustration directly in point. The battle of Gravelotte was the bloodiest and most obstinately contested field in all the campaign, and the fortunes of the war hinged upon it more than on any other, as was well understood by both combatants. After the battle had raged for twelve hours, and seemed to be increasing in fury, Moltke, that prince of strategists, rode up to the King of Prussia, and quietly said, "The battle is finished." He meant that the key of the position was wrested from the enemy, and that it was only a matter of time now for his dispositions to close the struggle. And it was only in that sense that Christ's work, as a whole,

was finished on the cross. The contest was raging fiercer than ever, and still rages; but He then won the key of the position. He triumphed over the enemy in His cross, and their complete extirpation was thenceforth only a question of time.

That is how it stands in regard to the entire height and depth, and length and breadth of Christ's work. That victory, on that high place of the field, virtually finished it. It secured everything. But while this represents the true state of the case as regards Christ's work as a whole, we know of some things which were then not virtually, but conclusively ended, *absolutely* finished, when the dying Saviour spake the word. For instance, scarcely had it passed His lips, when the veil of the temple was rent, by an unseen hand, from top to bottom, signifying that *the typical system*, of which it was so prominent a part, was now abolished. And again, *the animal sacrifices*, which had so long bled on both Jewish and pagan altars, had now accomplished their mission, since the one true sacrifice was slain. The high priest from among men was now for ever superseded by Him who liveth and abideth for ever. The time was now past when that temple in Jerusalem should be any longer the only authorized meeting-place between God and sinners, and henceforth He would be found of them who sought Him by the new and living way, among all kindreds and tongues and nations.

And furthermore, there was now also finished, absolutely and completely, a vast number of prophecies bearing on the Messiah's humiliation and sufferings and death. And the Saviour's mind, we know, was much occupied with these prophecies, and He was, as it were, mentally running over them all as He hung upon the cross, to make sure that they were accomplished every one. At ver. 28, we read, "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now

accomplished, that the Scriptures might now be fulfilled, saith, "I thirst."

Whatever were the loads pressing on the Saviour's spirit in His last moments, it was certainly not one of them that He had omitted anything of all that had been given Him to do. With a clear conscience He could say, "It is finished." And how different in this respect was that death from the death of almost every one! Most, even the best and most diligent, depart under an oppressive sense of incompleteness, and especially if they die early, as the Saviour did. They feel as if their life-work had hardly been begun, and that nothing is finished as it should be; and oh how they would wish to live a little longer, were it only to impart some degree of coherence and consistency to their characters and lives! How very few can say with Paul, in the calm consciousness that their work is done, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"! And no one, I am sure, besides the blessed Saviour, reviewing all the labours and duties of the past, can venture to say with his dying lips, and knowing that he speaks the absolute truth, "It is finished."

III. *Some of the practical effects which the finishing of Christ's work should have upon us.*

1. *It ought to annihilate all disposition to self-righteousness.*

The natural man has no pleasure in contemplating the work of Christ as finished. He must first be brought to his right mind, must first be made to see himself a helpless, worthless, undone, and perishing sinner; and then a *finished* work—a work requiring no additions and no contributions of his—will exactly suit his ease. But, until he be brought to that, it finds no favour in his eyes. He wants to have a hand in the work, to pay a moiety of the ransom, to do something that will count; in a word, to be

his own saviour in part, and not to be entirely beholden to Christ. But that word, "It is finished," cuts up by the roots all endeavours of this sort, all going about to establish a righteousness of our own. The needed righteousness *is* established, *is* perfected, and we may have it, if we will take it, as God's free and sovereign gift to us; but we must not touch it, no, not so much as with one of our fingers, in the way of enhancing its value or completing its efficacy. "It is finished."

2. *We should see in Christ's work being* FINISHED *a ground of* IMMEDIATE *peace and joy.*

We frequently read in Scripture of this happy frame of mind springing up *immediately* upon believing on Jesus. The three thousand on Pentecost, when they had embraced the Gospel offer, "did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people" (Acts ii. 46, 47). The eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts viii. 39). The Philippian jailor "rejoiced, believing, with all his house" (Acts xvi. 34). And what warrant is there for any one rejoicing so speedily as in these and such-like cases? Why, the warrant is full and clear. You have only to enter into the full import of the word, "It is finished." Jesus has done all that was needed for your acceptance. Nothing remains for you to do but to accept it, and to take the comfort of it. "Jesus paid it all." That is the glad tidings of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. And until we perceive that Christ's finished work supplies a ground for immediate peace and comfort, we are yet ignorant of what the Gospel is. And

3. *In that triumphant exclamation, "It is finished" (and it was and exclamation of triumph), we see the pledge that Christ's work will be completed in all His people.*

"I am crucified with Christ," every believer can say. "His death to the law was my death to the law. His

triumph over the principalities and powers of darkness was my triumph over the same. An hour is appointed for me, too, when I can say, 'It is finished;' for I know that in whom He has begun a good work He will also finish it." The moment His atoning work becomes their ground of confidence, the moment they truly embrace Him by faith, their final triumph is secured. There is much fighting still to be done, a fierce and prolonged struggle before them; but they hold the key of the situation, and shall, in due time, be made more than conquerors through Him that loves them.

When Jesus said, "It is finished," He bowed His head, and committed His spirit into His Father's hands; and we can fancy how the bystanders might have put a very narrow and inadequate interpretation upon the word. "Hear Him!" they might have said. "He has said, 'It is finished,' and so died. And is it not finished in good sooth? It is all over both with Him and His prospects. His sun is set. We shall hear no more of Jesus of Nazareth, nor of His claim to be a King and to have a kingdom." "It is finished." And even His own disciples were not proof against this desponding interpretation. The two on the way to Emmaus were persuaded that it was finished in the sense of being wound up and extinguished. "We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel" (Luke xxiv. 21).

But little did they dream what He meant by its being finished. It was not finished *with* HIM, but finished with sin, and with him who had the power of it; finished with the curse of sin, finished with death; for death, in planting his sting in Christ, stung *himself* to death, just as the wasp, when it plants its sting in any other creature, dies itself. That word, "It is finished," rang the knell of sin and all its consequences in the case of all for whom Christ died.

They shall rise as certainly as He rose. They shall be like Him. They shall reign with Him through eternal ages, and of their blessedness there is one word that will never be spoken: it will never be said, "It is finished."

In the foregoing treatment of this subject, good cause, I trust, has been shown wherefore the true disciples of Christ should rejoice and be exceeding glad. Their Saviour's finished work should be the all-sufficient antidote to every danger which can threaten them, to every fear which haunts them. As I said at the outset, we need nothing more than a clear apprehension and trustful embrace of the Saviour's exclamation, "It is finished," in order to make us supremely happy; and it is my earnest wish and prayer that many of you may participate in that happiness this day.

But this pillar of light is not without a dark and frowning side to those who know not God, and obey not the Gospel. His enemies were terribly frightened when He said, "It is finished." The word had fearful accompaniments. The earth quaked; the rocks were rent; graves were opened; and the onlookers smote upon their breasts and fled, fancying, I suppose, *that all was finished*, and that the day of doom had come. They were mistaken, of course. But a day *is* coming when it will be no mistake; and the awful portents will not subside till the earth and the things therein have been burned up. And who shall abide that day? It affects you little now, because it seems so distant. But we have no warrant for calling it distant. The Judge may be even now at the door, and sudden destruction ready to burst upon the wicked; for as a thief shall it come on all them that dwell on the earth. It will truly then be finished for the ungodly and the sinner; finished with mercy, finished with prayer, finished with all the pleasures

of sin, finished with everything except the wrath of God, and *it* will be for ever and for aye "the wrath *to come.*" And how will the terrors of that day be aggravated by the thought that the finished work of Jesus invited you to its refuge so often, and invited in vain; and that now He laughs at your calamity, and mocks when your fear cometh. You have it still in your power to take the sting out of all these terrors by fleeing to the Saviour, and by washing in His blood. And then when you come to say, "It is finished," as each of us will, in some sense or other, it will not be the despairing cry of a soul being launched into perdition, but a cry partaking of the triumph of Christ, and followed, as in His case, with this closing word, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke xxiii. 46). Amen.

VIII.

THE RECOGNITION OF PROVIDENCE.

"Look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door; is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?"—2 KINGS vi. 32.

I SUPPOSE, my friends, that, on hearing this text read, your first thought about it is that it is a somewhat strange and out-of-the-way one. And perhaps there is some truth in that. But the subject I am going to submit to your attention is, I hope, neither strange nor out of the way; and I employ this text only as a sort of pictorial illustration of it. The subject I have been meditating upon the most of last week, and which I should like you to meditate upon now, is, how much of God and of God's training we are daily in contact with, if we had only the spiritual discernment to see it, and to profit by it. God is teaching and training us by His providence as well as by His Word. Every event in our lives, and especially the events which produce any marked change in our earthly condition, are all messengers from God, and the sound of the Master's feet is behind them; and we should learn to hold fast these messengers, and to interrogate them about the Divine will regarding us. And I know nothing more appropriate to say to every household among you, and especially in respect to any afflictive dispensation which may be upon you—disappointment, sickness, or bereavement—than this, "Look,

when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door; is not the sound of the Master's feet behind him?"

I feel all the more at liberty to employ this text in the manner now indicated, inasmuch as Elisha, whose words they are, used them, in part at least, in a metaphorical sense, and looked away from the outward event to the Sovereign Ruler of all. The messenger was that of the wicked king Jehoram, sent to behead the prophet, and by saying that the sound of his master's feet was behind him, the prophet did not mean that the king was personally at the heels of his messenger, but simply that the proposed act plainly testified of its author. It was Jehoram all over, in every way like the man. There was no mistaking whose messenger this was—"Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?" And, more than that, Elisha heard other and louder and more solemn feet behind them all; for what do we read in the verse following? "And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him; and he said, *Behold, this evil is of the Lord.*" He heard the sound of his *own Master's* feet behind all other feet. "Behold, this evil is of the Lord."

And such is the state of sentiment and feeling that I should like to see established in myself and you; viz., the habit of referring everything to God, of seeing God in everything, and of regarding all the events of Providence as so many divinely commissioned teachers—messengers of God, whom we are to hold fast, and shut the door, and prayerfully and attentively listen for the sound of the Master's feet behind them.

Having thus, I hope, plainly enough indicated the subject to be discussed, I proceed—

In the first place, to show the Scriptural foundation for the doctrine which I wish to inculcate.

Secondly, to adduce a few practical illustrations of it in the world, the church, and the individual. And,

Thirdly, to urge upon you a few motives to practise the duty contained in this doctrine.

I. *The Scriptural foundation for the doctrine which I wish to inculcate.*

We have it set forth to us very concisely in the Shorter Catechism, in answer to the question, "What are God's works of providence?" And they are stated to be "His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions." But it is only His reasoning and moral and responsible creature, man, that we have to do with at present; and the doctrine as regards him is, that God is continually about him, influencing him in ways innumerable, and governing all his actions.

And, in support of this doctrine, we can adduce more Scripture testimony than we can possibly quote. For instance, in the case of *sinners*. When Shimei cursed David, the king recognized the hand of God in it: "So let him curse," exclaimed David, "because the Lord hath said to him, Curse David." Like Elisha here, he saw that the evil was from the Lord, and heard the sound of the Master's feet behind the messenger. And how remarkably the same truth is taught us in connection with all that the wicked did to our Lord. The disciples in prayer addressed God, saying, "Of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts iv. 27, 28). And in regard to the wicked generally, the Psalmist, praising God, says, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee; the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain" (Ps. lxxvi. 10).

But the fullest Scripture evidence relates to the righteous. Our Lord tells them that the very hairs of their head are numbered, and that nothing can befall them without the knowledge and permission of their heavenly Father. All things are made to work together for their good. The Lord's eyes are continually upon them, and He keeps them as the apple of His eye; and it is their greatest delight to know this, and to acknowledge it: "In Him we live, and move, and have our being;" "I will cry unto God Most High, unto God that performeth all things for me." But this doctrine is so much the basis on which all Scripture is projected, that the task of adducing evidence is really endless. All Scripture either expressly declares it or takes it for granted.

And the highest reason, as far as it can penetrate into the matter, takes the same view as Scripture. On a very pigmy scale man himself exercises a providence. He acquires so intimate an acquaintance with many of the laws of nature, that he can employ them in working out his wishes. He acquires such influence over large masses of his fellow-men, as to get them to do almost anything at his bidding. And when we expand this same thing upwards to the infinite height of God, we have all that the Scripture doctrine contends for. We have God ruling over all, and directing all things, by the word of His power.

We must be careful, however, in the uses which we make of this doctrine, not to make God the author of sin by it. The author of sin is the devil, and God's office, in regard to it, is in curbing and restraining and directing it, so as to make it subservient to the working out of His own ends. The incendiary raises a conflagration, and the endeavour of the firemen is to direct the flames, so as to do least mischief, and so as ultimately to put them out. And that is God's relation to evil. The devil has raised the con-

flagration. But God has taken the charge of it, and is directing all its course, for the highest well-being of His universe, and for finally restricting the conflagration to the one pit, "where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched."

But this doctrine of Providence, which Scripture teaches, and reason corroborates, and is so precious to God's people, is, you know, extensively denied in the present day. The secularists, as they call themselves, and who are just the same people as used to be called Deists, deny that there is any providence. God's connection with the world and its affairs, they say, is merely that of a first cause. He contrived the machine at the outset, and wound it up, and has left it to run itself down, according to its own laws, and without any further interference from Him; and that it is all useless, therefore, to pray, or to look for any tender mercies beyond what are supplied by living agreeably to the laws of nature. And I am afraid that the spirit of secularism is even more widely extended than its creed. Our age is not lacking in faith. But then, what are the objects of it? We have faith in the capabilities of the human intellect; faith in the power of money; faith in machinery, in commerce, in education, in science, in political expedients, and so forth; but very little faith in the unseen, in the directing power and wisdom of a present God, or in that inheritance laid up for them that love Him.

We willingly concede that God ordinarily carries on His providential government through means of second causes; but we deny that that necessarily removes God Himself from the scene. The ladder that Jacob saw, connecting heaven and earth, was composed of many steps, and many were the messengers ascending and descending upon it. But God Himself was at the top of

it; and, overlooking both the ladder and the angels, He spoke directly and personally to His child upon the earth. And we behold in that vision the precious doctrine which we cherish, and of which no sceptic shall rob us. Our God is "God over all," and yet not a God afar off, but a God at hand, upholding our goings, directing our steps, a Shepherd, and a Father. And although we see Him not with our bodily vision, but only the messengers He sends us, we can discern the sound of their Master's feet behind them.

II. Let us take a few illustrations of this doctrine of Providence.

And 1. *Upon the widest scale, on the wide arena of the world's history.*

History, my friends, is not a chaos of intermingling and discordant facts, without polarity, harmony, or design. All is held in the grasp of an infinite intelligence. The world's history is projected on a plan from which it never deviates. And amid all the political, social, and moral convulsions, which from time to time shake the world, we have this central column to lean upon, that God is present, that His chariot is in the whirlwind, His foot in the earthquake, and on the swelling flood. But it requires an anointing of the eyes to see this. To a careless eye, the facts of history look very much what the firmament does on a clear winter night, a mere wilderness of shining points, without either law or arrangement. But to the eye and mind of the astronomer it presents a far different spectacle. He sees in each of these shining points a mighty sun, the centre of a family of worlds, similar to what is revolving about our own sun; while all these suns are members of a yet higher system, circling around a central point, which may be the peculiar home of Deity, and from which the great God looks forth on the immen-

sity of His creation. And such, to the meditative and spiritual eye, is the history of all nations, and of all centuries. All are members of one vast system, having God for its centre; and every one, with its own cluster of events attached to it, revolving in the place arranged for it by the Sovereign Ruler.

We have some remarkable specimens of God's connection with history in those numerous prophecies about dynasties and nations which we have in the inspired record. Daniel, in his prophecy of the four beasts, broadly outlines the world's history to the very close. The fates of Babylon, and Tyre, and Jerusalem, and many other places and peoples, were minutely foretold. And what an evidence of God in history is all that has befallen the Jews, driven forth like another Cain, fugitives and vagabonds in the earth, for the murder of One whose blood speaks better things than the blood of Abel, but yet with a mark upon them, as in the case of Cain, that no man may destroy them! And how reassuring it is, how conducive to possessing our souls in patience, when our hearts are failing us for the things coming upon the earth, to reflect that they are all parts of the unfolding of the Divine plan, all messengers from the innermost shrine of Deity, and with the sounds of the Master's feet behind them! Or take—

2. *The case of the Church.*

We may rest assured that the Church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood, occupies a very prominent place in the executing of His providence. In fact, we may say that this present world is kept in existence purely for the sake of the Church. It is for the sake of the wheat that the tares are not all pulled up and cast into the fire. Christ is made Head over all things to the Church, for the Church's good, that is; and He is directing the whole current of secular history, with all its political

and social changes, to the one great consummation of completing and perfecting His Church. Secular history is only the scaffolding for the rearing of the spiritual house; and when the last stone is put upon it, amid shouts of, "Grace, grace unto it," the scaffolding will be taken down, secular history will terminate, time shall be no more, and that everlasting kingdom shall begin, where all shall be sacred, and bright, and happy. And nowhere, therefore, may we more confidently listen for the sounds of the Master's feet than in everything affecting His Church. Vast changes are in progress, in the ecclesiastical domain, all the world over. Old things are passing away; unions going on in one quarter, disintegrations in another; error putting on a bolder front on the popish side, and the simplicity of Gospel truth more distinctly set forth on the Protestant side. And these things, we may be sure, are all the heralds of a new epoch, a new disposition of the forces of good and evil, preparatory to some other grand encounter, the issue of which will supply yet more glorious evidence that the Lord reigneth. And—

3, *and lastly here. Does not much in our individual histories echo the sound of the Master's feet.*

There is no such instructive history to peruse in all the world as the history of our own lives, if we would only set down and record, from the beginning, hitherto, what God has done for us, and all the way He has led us. We should not be half through that history until, with hearts overflowing with gratitude, and raising our streaming eyes to heaven, we should exclaim, "Thou art my Father, and the Guide of my youth." It is a truly painful and humbling sight, enough to make angels weep, to see people accepting all the visitations of Providence with apparently no more recognition of the Master, whose messengers they are, than if they were so many "dumb, driven cattle." If any afflictive

stroke come upon them, they fall foul of the nearest visible agent engaged in it, minding us of the dog that worries the stone thrown at him, without any regard to the hand that flung it; or as if one should fall foul of the postman for bringing a letter containing disagreeable intelligence. And if prosperity be their lot for the time, they are no more grateful to the Author of it than the beasts which browse on the luxuriant herbage.

The sound of the Master's feet is most easily recognized in connection with afflictive dispensations; for then the stillness is greatest, and the sound the loudest, from the roughness of the way: and even the most callous minds are willing to recognize God's hand at such a time. And such seasons have been greatly blessed to many—the dawn, in fact, of a new and brighter day. Perhaps a greater miracle was wrought in the house of mourning at Bethany than at the grave of Lazarus; and only "the day" will declare how many miracles of grace have been wrought in the seasons of affliction and sorrow.

But it is more difficult to hear the sound of the Master when He comes with muffled feet, and over a velvety lawn; I mean in the time of prosperity, in the day when we have no changes, and our mountain standeth sure. And yet, at such a time, God has as clear a purpose to answer as in the time of affliction. Despisest thou the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God *leadeth thee to repentance?* God does not cease to look after us as soon as we cease to suffer. He has more methods of dealing with us than by the rod, and prosperity is one of them, and He designs prosperity to lead us to repentance. But, alas! how often has it the very opposite effect! Like some of the desperate and potent remedies the physician may employ upon our bodies, it either kills or cures. If it do not lead us to repentance,

it leads us to a state of almost hopeless callousness and indifference to spiritual and eternal things. The effect of misimproved prosperity is to be *let alone;* and that is the heaviest Divine stroke which can befall a sinner in this life —a stroke which is tantamount to eternal perdition. And let the tranquil and careless among us, who are idly reposing in the lap of ease and luxury, realize how heavy tidings the sound of the Master's feet may be bringing them. He is saying, "Let them alone;" and that is worse than all the distresses which can be crowded upon our heads.

III. Motives to cultivate the habit of recognizing the sound of the Master's feet in all that befalls us.

1. *It will invest life with a new interest.*

I knew a man in Christ, now taken to his rest, who read the newspapers almost as devoutly as he read his Bible, and all because of the habit he had acquired of recognizing the directing hand of God in whatsoever comes to pass. The commonest life in this way becomes, as it were, "transfigured," and a "light that never was on sea or land," exalts and glorifies it. Such a one is endowed with a sort of "second sight," similar to what we read of in this chapter (v. 12), when the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened, and he beheld the mountain, round about his master, filled with chariots and horsemen of fire. What in our heedless days we called "the course of nature," we come to see to be the ways of Providence, full of a Father's wisdom and a Father's love; and unless we cultivate this habit of discovering a directing hand behind the visible, how can we know that our prayers are fulfilled? We pray for guidance, and shall we not recognize the sound of the Master's feet behind the events which turn up to guide us? And what interest can compare with that of collecting

evidence that God hears us, and is fulfilling all our highest and noblest desires?

2. *Such a habit will greatly enlarge our views of God's Word.*

Providence is just the Bible illustrated; and until we see its precepts and promises and threatenings actually brought into play, and reduced to practice, our knowledge of it will be of the same superficial and unsatisfactory kind as that of the man who has learned some science solely from books (*e.g.*, chemistry or geology), but who knows nothing of the actual practice of the sciences, and who cannot tell one chemical or one rock from another when they are placed before his eyes. The principles and the practice must go together to make one perfect. And to this effect we find Paul, in the Hebrews (v. 14), describing those who are of full age, and capable of being fed with strong meat, as those "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." And Providence is the right field for such exercise, and we shall thereby attain to a deeper and fuller knowledge of God's Word than we can ever attain to if we take it by itself. Providence we may compare to the dial-plate. The Bible is the internal works. And it is both together which inform us what of the day or what of the night.

3. *Such a habit will greatly promote spirituality of mind.*

Of course this would follow from the fact that it gives us a larger and more practical acquaintance with Scripture, for Scripture is one of the principal instruments which the Holy Ghost employs in the sanctification of God's people. But, over and above this, such a habit must sustain in us a conscious nearness to God, and that I apprehend is the same thing as heavenly-mindedness. It is, as in Moses' case, "Enduring as seeing Him who is invisible;" and, as in Enoch's case, it is "walking with God." The child

of God, who is accustomed to consider the ways of the Lord, will often hear a voice behind him speaking to him a word in season that nobody else hears nor knows anything about, but which he feels has largely contributed to the quickening and purifying of his own soul. The messenger comes, and he shuts the door upon him, and he learns that he has a private communication for him—something about some unmortified lust, some neglected duty, some unobserved outlet for Christian benevolence. And plied thus, on the one hand, by God's Word, and, on the other, by God's Providence, he advances in the likeness of God at a double speed, and will soon be ready to pass within the veil.

In the fourth and last place, this habit of attending to God's dealings with us in Providence will inspire us with great confidence regarding the future.

The inference which the Psalmist draws from the past to the future is well grounded: "The Lord *hath* been mindful of us, and He will bless us still" (Ps. cxv. 12). And it was also from a retrospect of all that the Lord *had* done for him in the past, that he said, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." The Lord is our Shepherd, we shall not want, and even unto death He will guide us. And when things around us look dark and threatening, let us call to mind the days of old, let us recount the many tokens of God's favour to us in the past, and so shall we trust Him still. "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Isa. xl. 4).

In conclusion, I trust, my friends, I have been enabled to say something to interest you in this precious doctrine,

and which will induce you to cultivate the habit of connecting all the ongoings of the world, and especially the events of your own individual histories, with the wisdom and mercy and faithfulness of an ever-present God. And, I assure you, it will he accompanied with all the good effects I have named, and many more than I can name. You will then truly live as Christians, and not as atheists, which is the way that most people live. And it is wonderful how the idea of a present God will grow upon you if you once begin to let it work. Elijah's servant, when he looked from Carmel, saw a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, rising out of the sea, but it speedily enlarged till it filled the whole heavens, and poured down the much-needed blessing on the dry, parched earth. And so, at first, although you may perceive only some faint appearance of God's gracious hand in the ordering of your lives, the longer you look, the more that evidence will multiply, until you perceive God on every side of you, "in your going forth and your coming in, in your sitting down and your rising up, compassing all your ways" (Ps. cxxxix. 1). And thus, like Enoch, you shall walk with God. And, in due time, the sound of the Master's feet, which your ear has become so quick to catch, will be exchanged for the sight of the Master's face. And so shall you ever be with Lord. Amen.

IX.

*THE PRECIOUSNESS OF GOD'S WORD.**

"The word of the Lord was precious in those days."—1 SAM. iii. 1.

THE days referred to in this text are very old days, reaching back to beyond three thousand years ago. But we must not therefore conclude that they can have no manner of connection with *our* days; for human nature is essentially the same in all ages. And just as now, by going forth over all the earth, you may accumulate as much evidence as you wish that, as regards *space*, God has made of one blood all men to dwell on the face of the whole earth; so as regards *time*, penetrate to the farthest and dimmest regions of the past, you will find that men have also been of one blood, always the same in the essential features of thought and action, and that "the thing which hath been is that which shall be," and that "there is no new thing under the sun" (Eccles. i. 9). We may therefore turn to those old-world records confidently and thankfully, employing them in the way that Paul indicates when he says of them, "Those things are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come" (1 Cor. x. 11).

Our text does not mean what you would naturally suppose it to mean, on first reading it, although I believe, and as I shall show, the first impression we have on reading it is

---

* Preached in 1821, with reference to Mr. Voysey's lectures delivered in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

also included in it. It asserts that the word of the Lord was *precious*. Now there never, in fact, was a time in the history of Israel when the word of the Lord was less known and less cared for by the mass of the people. It was a time of great spiritual declension and abounding iniquity. With the exception of Eli, the high priest—a good, but easy and irresolute man—the ministers of religion were among the most avaricious and profligate of the people; and like priest, like people. "Men," we are told, "abhorred the offering of the Lord" (ii. 17). And what, then, are we to understand by the word of the Lord being *precious* in those days? The word here rendered "precious" also signifies *rare, scarce, difficult to be found;* and that, you know, is the *cause* of anything being precious. The two terms, scarce and precious, are closely allied, but the idea predominating here is that of scarcity, as is further shown by the explanatory clause that follows: "There was no open vision," there was no direct communication, *i.e.*, between the Lord and any prophet upon earth. The Lord was silent. He seemed to have forsaken and forgotten His people; their house was left unto them desolate; and, during that dreary period, the whole people had lapsed into carelessness and wickedness.

It might be instructive to inquire here, in passing, what might have been the cause of this interruption of the communication between heaven and earth, to which the Israelites had been accustomed; and in the absence of direct information upon the point, we may account for it by one or other of two suppositions.

1. *He may have been trying and proving His people.* He often did so, after a similar fashion, and when they had to say, "Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour" (Isa. xlv. 15); "We see not our signs, there is no more any prophet, neither is there among

us any that knoweth how long" (Ps. lxxiv. 9). And in the case of God's true people such a course on the part of God would deepen their humility, and strengthen their faith and patience, and quicken their prayers, that the Lord would again manifest Himself graciously unto them. But on the wicked the effect would be to harden them more, and to open their mouths in scoffing and blasphemy, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" or,

2. *The Lord's silence may have been in judgment.* His Spirit may have been grieved by the people's unfaithfulness and resistance, until He would strive no longer with them, but gave them over for a season to reap as they had sown. And this, we verily believe, is the principal explanation still of the little success attending the proclamation of God's truth among us. There is no scarcity of the *letter* of the Word, but a lamentable scarcity of the spirit—of its quickening, vitalizing force. Bibles were never so plentiful nor so cheap; the means of grace are brought to almost everybody's door, but still conversions are few. Few believe our report, and to few is the arm of the Lord revealed; and the reason is that the letter, no matter how abundant it may be, profiteth nothing if the spirit be withheld. What is the use of going on sowing seed in a field on which no rain falls, and no sunshine reaches? And such are many of our congregations—fields choke full of the seed, and running over; but for our sins, for our want of faith, and want of prayer, the spiritual heavens are as brass over our heads, and all continues to be lifeless and formal.

But there can be no question that though the *primary* meaning of our text be such as I have now indicated, the other meaning, the one which suggests itself to you on first reading it, is also to be connected with it, and may legitimately be made the subject of our meditations. To

those who were really the Lord's people in "those days," the very *scarcity* of His word would make it all the more *precious*. And let the time be as spiritually dark and dead as it may, it is never without such; God has never left Himself without a witness. You remember that when Elijah thought that he only was left, God told him that there were yet seven thousand "hidden ones" in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. To such the word of the Lord, as far as they had it, would be very *precious* in those days; and its extreme rarity would only enhance its preciousness. What are the so-called "precious stones" but just *rare* stones? If the diamond, and the ruby, and the emerald, and the rest of them, were to be as common and plentiful as granite, or freestone, or slatestone, they would cease to be precious; and it is highly probable, I think, that Christian ordinances would be much more prized by most people, if they were more *precious* in the sense here intended. A congregation deprived of a stated ministry for a time, begins to realize how great a privation it would be to want it; and when restored to them, they should prize it more than they have ever done before. And we know how the invalid, shut out for months, and may be years, from public ordinances, discovers a preciousness in them that he had never discerned while in the constant enjoyment of them, saying, with David, in similar circumstances, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar" (Ps. xlii. 6). And how many of our countrymen who go away to our distant colonies, and where they find the word of the Lord to be scarce, learn to attach to it a preciousness that they never dreamt of at home? King Saul paid but little heed to Samuel while he had him, but when he was dead and gone, what would he have given for one half-hour of him.

And in the agony of his soul he went to the witch, in the cave of Endor, exclaiming, "Bring me up Samuel!" And a time may come to all, who have paid little heed to teachers whose services they could command at any time, when they would give all the world, if they had it to give, for one lesson more and one interview more; but, like Esau, they may not find it, though they seek it carefully with tears. Their "day of grace" is over; the things belonging to their peace are for ever hid from their eyes.

Taking now the term "precious" as applied to God's Word, in the usual sense, and which we have seen is legitimately included in our text, let us consider—

I. Some of the reasons which make God's Word precious.

II. The seasons which most plainly demonstrate its preciousness. "The word of the Lord was precious in those days."

I. *Some of the reasons which make God's Word precious.*

I restrict myself to three of these. And—

1. The Word of God is precious, *just because it is the Word of God.*

And here, of course, the enemies of inspiration, who now-a-days spring up in strange quarters, at once beard us with the question, "How do you know that it is the Word of God?" "What higher reverence are the Christian writings entitled to than the sacred books of Mohammedanism, Hindooism, or Mormonism?" Well, that is not a question to be answered in a breath. The field is both wide and varied, and does not admit of being overtaken in one of the subordinate heads of a sermon. But surely it ought to count for something, in this controversy, that the Bible has kept its ground, as God's Word, for so long a time, and, despite all the ordeals through which it has

passed, is at this hour the best known and most extensively read book in the world. The Hindoos have lost all respect for the teachings of their Vedas, as has been recently certified to us by one of their leading teachers, himself not a Christian, and who has been addressing large audiences up and down our country (Keshub Chunder Sen). And, as everybody knows, the Koran is effete, and the boundaries of Mohammedanism steadily contracting; while the Book of Mormon is the laughing-stock of the world. But the Bible, the while, instead of partaking of this decay, has been steadily filling the face of the world, and is penetrating into countries which a short time ago were hermetically sealed against it. Verily, "the word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. ii. 9); but, like the mighty angel in the Apocalypse, holding it in his hand, as he flies in the midst of heaven, it is borne on the wings of all the winds, and is known and read by all kindreds, and tongues, and nations; and in that one fact alone we have evidence that it is the word of Him who liveth and abideth for ever. Perhaps the timid among us, when they hear of this and the other bold adversary of the Bible standing forth, may feel their hearts trembling for the ark of God. But they may keep their minds easy upon that head. The Bible is not a great lumbering blaspheming Goliath of Gath, to be laid low by a "sling and a stone," from any such puny and unclean hands as essay such a task at present. It is the strength and wonder of the ages. And as it has triumphed always and in every place, in the past, so we may confidently depend upon it, it will in the future, until it has brought to nought all the pride and wisdom and opposition of the carnal mind.

A very good practical course to follow when our faith is in any danger of being shaken by any attacks upon the Scriptures, is to retreat upon the fact that Jesus Himself

believed these books to be of Divine inspiration, as far as they were written in His day, and always spake of them with the profoundest reverence. Of course it will be attempted to take this ground from under us, by asserting that Jesus knew nothing about it in comparison with modern critics—that He was either Himself deceived, or wilfully strove to deceive others. And that is the very issue which it comes to, and which we wish to see it brought to. We should like to see the man who can satisfactorily make it out, to himself or others, that Jesus was either an ignorant dupe or a heartless impostor. And until one or other of these positions be established, we will be content to believe what Jesus believed, and will take the risk of being found wrong in company with Him. With Him we will believe that the great God has spoken to man, and that the Bible is the true record of His mind and will—a "faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation."

2. The Word of God is *precious, because of the kind of knowledge which it contains.*

We hold that all knowledge about right things is good. "It is not good for the soul to be without knowledge" (Prov. xix. 2). Knowledge is to the soul what air is to the lungs; and if the knowledge, like the air, be pure and uncontaminated, it is wholesome and invigorating. We believe that "knowledge is power." And we have no sympathy with those hackneyed sayings of the poet about ignorance being bliss, and a little learning being a dangerous thing. The bliss of ignorance is not the bliss which we should like to see coveted by rational and responsible beings. And we hold that the next best thing to too *much* learning is a *little* learning; for we have faith in learning growing on what it feeds. It is of the nature of knowledge to stimulate further inquiry, and to go on adding to its stores. An ignorant people is both a useless and a

dangerous people, capable of being only hewers of wood and drawers of water, and the ready tools of every designing and unprincipled agitator. We rejoice in the progress of knowledge, of purely secular knowledge even, and would do everything in our power to help it forward. And there is no lack of means and appliances for the dissemination of such knowledge in our days. We seem to have fallen on the time predicted by Daniel, when "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

But with all our admiration for secular knowledge, we must carefully keep in mind that it does not reach to our necessities as sinners. It cannot tell us how the guilty conscience is to be pacified, the evil heart purified, and death and judgment to be met without fear. A man may be as learned in all the wisdom of the *modern* world as Moses was in all the wisdom of the *ancient* world; he may be able to speak his way to the wall of China, as one of our own Church professors was able to do; he may be deeply read in all literature and philosophy, and show himself to be quite at home in the most sublime and difficult of the sciences; but there is nothing in any or all of these that the immortal soul can rest upon, in view of the eternity into which we must pass. No earthly philosophy can give hope in death. All the sciences together cannot soothe a dying pillow. And it is to the Word of God that we must turn to find the knowledge that we most urgently need, the knowledge of things unseen and eternal, the knowledge of pardon and reconciliation, of life and immortality. And these are the things which have been brought to light by the Gospel; these are the things which our ears are permitted to hear, and our eyes are permitted to see, and which were withheld from some of the best and noblest of our race who greatly desired to possess such knowledge. There is a very remarkable passage in one

of Plato's writings, the book called "The Phaedon," in which he mourns over the incapacity of human reason to grapple with the questions which man is most vitally interested in; and that sublimest of heathen thinkers ventures a hope that a time might yet come when God would take pity upon man's weakness and ignorance, and send him a "revelation." "And by which," he says, "we may happily accomplish the voyage of this life, as in a vessel that fears no danger." And that dim yearning of the noblest mind of the pagan world has been realized, and we are the happy possessors of it. And let us prize it as it deserves, saying with Paul, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." I remark thirdly and lastly, under this head—

3. The Word of God is precious, *because of the designs which it proposes to itself.*

There is no use trying to keep alive an interest in anything, unless the practical advantages of it be clear and indisputable. Our lot is cast in a pre-eminently practical age, and the question, "Cui bono?" as the Latins expressed it, what is the good of it? (however narrow and utilitarian, it may be sound,) will always recur, and ultimately carry the day. And God's Word is most willing to be tested on this ground. It makes most exalted professions of what it is able to do. It promises to deliver the whole world from the thraldom of ignorance, sin, and Satan. It promises to exalt nations, to bless all the families of the earth, and every individual who yields himself up to its influences. And have these promises been, in any degree, made good, furnishing a pledge that all in due time will be fulfilled? I think that no one, with his eyes open, can do otherwise than answer in the affirmative.

It was this Word which turned the world upside down in the earlier ages of Christianity (its enemies being judges),

scattering the darkness of paganism, and imparting a new breath of life to humanity, when it was on the very verge of despair, and sunk in a corruption which threatened its speedy extinction. And we will hazard the assertion, because profoundly convinced of the truth of it, that, at this day, the prosperity of every nation upon earth is more closely bound up with the Word of God than with anything else that can be named. In proportion as this Word is honoured or slighted among a people, in the same proportion light or darkness, good morals or bad morals, liberty or despotism, good laws or bad laws, will be found in the land. Look over the world at the present moment, and say what are the countries where the largest amount of ignorance, superstition, crime, and tyranny are to be found, and you will be forced to acknowledge that they are the same countries in which the Bible is a forbidden and unknown book. And with all their faults, and they are not a few, and we have no wish to cloak them, the countries where the Bible is known and prized are the countries which most largely enjoy the blessings of peace and liberty, and where most is being devised and executed for God's glory and the good of men.

But the designs of God's Word reach far beyond anything which we see accomplished here. It is intended to lift us out of all that the fall has sunk us in, and to reinstate us in a glory vastly more excellent than what we have lost. It is the Word which maketh wise unto salvation, which effectually worketh in all them that believe, and which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified. Its moral miracles are as wondrous as any physical miracles. It makes drunkards sober, the unclean pure-minded, the proud humble, the violent and outrageous meek and lowly, and the selfish and miserly generous and open-handed. And

that these are no vain boasts is attested by tens of thousands in every age, and by a multitude which no man can number already before the throne, and who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the *word* of His testimony.

II. *The seasons which most plainly demonstrate its preciousness.*

"The word of the Lord was precious in *those days*." And in what days especially is that Word precious? I would answer that question in four particulars, and each of them very briefly.

1. The Word of God is very precious in days of *ignorance, and spiritual darkness, and abounding wickedness.*

These were the sort of days to which our text more immediately refers; and very precious must have been God's Word to all those who sighed and cried for all the abominations done in the land (Ezek. ix. 4). And in similar times, in Josiah's day, how greatly was the Word prized when it was found in a corner of the Temple, and how eagerly they listened to its teachings! And what mean we by "the dark ages," except just the ages when the Bible was a sealed book, and lay buried under the commandments and traditions of men? And to what do we owe the Reformation and all its attendant blessings, but just to the Bible being once more exalted to its rightful place? Not more certainly do the rising and setting of the sun regulate the light and darkness of the globe, than does the treatment which the Bible receives regulate the moral and spiritual condition of a people. And no greater blessing can we secure, for ourselves and for our children, and for any other people, than to assist in making them a Bible-reading and a Bible-loving people.

2. The Word of God is precious in days of *spiritual awakening, spiritual distress, and anxious inquiry.*

It has been through the entrance of that Word, in some manner or other, that we have become sensible of our lost and ruined condition. And it is that Word alone which can direct us to the remedy. He that hath torn must also heal.

> "'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
> And grace that fear relieved;
> How gracious did Thy word appear
> The hour I first believed!"

"The entrance of Thy word giveth light," says the Psalmist (cxix. 130), and from that quarter alone is the true light to be sought. The Word is the grand instrument in the Spirit's hand of converting and sanctifying His people. It tells them all they need to know, all they need to believe, all they need to do. It discloses to them their real situation, as guilty and condemned. It declares to them the immaculate holiness, the unbending justice of God's character, and how He can by no means clear the guilty without satisfaction being made for their sins. And it clearly sets before them the way of pardon and acceptance, through the atonement and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and presses it upon them by every argument and every encouragement. A diligent and prayerful student of the Word, earnestly seeking for the light and peace of the Gospel, is in the right way, and the Lord will find him, and bestow upon him the desire of his heart.

3. The Word of God is very precious *in days of adversity.*

A large portion of the Bible is intended for the afflicted; and if God's people were to be exempted from affliction, they could have little or no practical acquaintance with most of "the exceeding great and precious promises," and that for the simple reason that they are not in circumstances to require them. In fine weather the officers on board ship make but scanty use of their charts and nautical

tables, because they are not required; but when foul and stormy weather comes, they are carefully and anxiously examined for all the needful information. And, in like manner, our Bibles become far more precious to us, and are much more earnestly perused, in our dark and cloudy days, than when the sun of unbroken prosperity shines upon our path. It is then most especially that we can say with the Psalmist, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me O God! how great is the sum of them!" (Ps. cxxxix. 17.) I remark, lastly,

4. That the Word of God is precious in *dying days.*

A dying day is one of the surest items in our future history—the day that will extinguish all our earthly projects, and terminate all the labour wherewith we have wearied ourselves under the sun. And, in anticipation of that day, there is nothing more certain than that we shall get no solid and rational comfort and support upon it, except from the Word of God. All other reading that we have delighted in—the books of science, and travels, and romance, and poetry—the newspapers and periodicals that we used to look for so impatiently, will then be unopened and unheeded. Our money may procure for us the best medical advice, the best attendance, the best medicines and cordials, but it cannot buy one cheering ray of light for the troubled conscience. Relatives may lovingly and tenderly bear us up in their arms, and anticipate our every want, but our spirits have waded into waters too deep for their arms to reach us. We shall feel awfully alone, if we be conscious of no presence except that of our fellow-mortals. The hour shall have come that will try every man's work, of what sort it is; and it must now be made manifest whether we have been building on the rock or on the sand. And if we have learned betimes to repose on the Rock, if we be no strangers to trusting and loving

and serving the Saviour, death, although a solemn thing, and, in many respects, a painful thing, will not be without its bright and cheerful side. To die will be gain. It will be to depart and to be with Jesus, which is far better. And how precious and sustaining in that hour will be the words of God: "Fear not; when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

> "Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
> Yet will I fear none ill;
> For Thou art with me, and Thy rod
> And staff me comfort still."

I have not much more to add by way of practically applying the subject.

I trust that what I have been enabled to say to you from this text has been instrumental in calling forth afresh your love and reverence for the Word of God. We live in days when that Word is passing through another of its fiery ordeals, and this time not so much at the hands of the avowed and implacable enemies, who have always given the Bible, and all connected with it, the widest possible berth, but at the hands of those who have vowed to be its friends, and are paid to uphold and defend its Divine authority. Ordained ministers of religion, in our own and other lands, may be counted by thousands, who are striving with all their might to persuade their fellow-men that the words of the Bible are worthless as infallible expressions of God's mind and will; that its distinctive doctrines of human guilt and depravity, of Christ's incarnation and atoning death, of His resurrection and ascension and coming again, are the merest superstitions and fables, that we ought to be ashamed of. And having discarded the truths of Revelation, we are counselled to fall back on

the deductions of human reason and the discoveries of science, as the only true light to our feet and lamp to our path.

And surely, at such a time, the call to us is both loud and urgent, to hold fast the form of sound words, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. i. 13). There is a general breaking up in progress among the professed followers of Christ, such as there was when He was upon earth. The real and the unreal are becoming more and more separate, and a clearer line of demarcation is being drawn between the true and the false, as the word of prophecy, I believe, leads us to expect will be the case in the last days. Many that have hitherto been following Christ have taken offence at Him, and have gone back, to walk no more with Him, and have joined the ranks of those who betray Him with a kiss, and cry, "Away with Him!" And in view of this defection, which has so extensively set in, Christ is coming to you and saying, "Will ye also go away?" (John vi. 67.) May we have grace to reply with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John vi. 68, 69).

The best service we can render the Word of God, in these perilous times, and it is within the reach of every one of us to render it, is to be "living epistles, known and read of all men." Let it be seen that that Word is working in us effectually, and fulfilling all the high designs it proposes, and we will do more for its defence than all the sermons and treatises of the most learned divines. You shall have the testimony in yourselves, and will know that the doctrine is of God, and will *know* it in such a way, as no arguments of the rationalist, or other infidel, will be able to move or unsettle you. And you will

be a living, walking testimony for Bible truth, that the adversaries will never be able to resist or gainsay. The most stubborn must yield to the logic of facts. And if your light so shine before men as to make it manifest that the words of God are a living power within you, and that your works are wrought in God, you will put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and may happily constrain them to give glory to God by repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom be praise for ever and ever! Amen.

X.

THE BELIEVER'S COMPANIONS.

"I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts."—Ps. cxix. 63.

AMONG the multiplicity of topics which may be fittingly considered for practical uses by those who have publicly signified their engagement to be the Lord's, by joining in the celebration of the Holy Supper, as so many of us have done recently, the matter of *companionship* is worthy of being specially noted, and is so very expressly in the Word of God. Paul says to the Corinthians (1 Cor. x. 21), who were chargeable, more than others, with desecrating the Lord's table, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and the table of devils." That is to say, they would completely falsify their profession of being the Lord's, if they should leave *His* table to seek the company of those whose principles and practices are more in keeping with the character of the evil one than with that of the holy and blessed Saviour. And to the same people he says, to the like effect (2 Cor. vi. 14—16), "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement

hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

And there can be no question but that this matter of companionship goes as far as any external thing that can be named, to make or mar our character as Christians. And, to the young especially, this subject should come home with peculiar emphasis. It touches all, of every age, but its transcendent importance belongs to the young. Older people are growing shy of new acquaintances, and are receding more and more into retirement as years advance. But the young are just "coming out," as the phrase is, and are eager to make friendships. And to them this matter is urgent and vital, and cannot be too much insisted upon. And while *all* may find, in what I am going to say, what most closely concerns them, I invite the young, and especially our young communicants (of whom there was an unusually large number on this occasion—the largest, in fact, which has been in my time), I specially invite them to attend to the Lord's message at my lips this day.

If we might indulge in a little philosophizing about companionship, it would at once bring us face to face with a deep and primary want of our nature, impressed upon us by the hand of our Creator. He made us for company, and we can neither be healthy nor happy without company. He had hardly made Adam when He said, "It is not good for man to be *alone*." In fact, it is very bad, as is plainly witnessed in all who are much addicted to solitary habits. One of the most terrible forms of punishment which can be inflicted on criminals is solitary confinement; and if continued for any considerable time, they almost invariably go insane. And something akin to

insanity—something plainly tending in that direction—may be discerned in all who shun the society of their fellows, and want to have no companions. They are hypochondriac, nervous, narrow-minded, full of all manner of unfounded suspicions and alarms. It would be wrong and mischievous therefore to forbid companions. Our aim should be rather to guide this heaven-implanted instinct aright, to provide suitable gratification for it, and to instill correct views and principles in the matter of selecting companions. And we could not have a better directory, in this matter, than the principle followed by the Psalmist in selecting his companions: "I am a companion of them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts." In speaking for a little from this text, I remark—

I. *The Psalmist was guided by a high standard of character in selecting his companions.* They were such as feared the Lord, and kept His precepts. That is to say, he would admit none to be his companions except truly religious persons.

But, sad to say, these are not much in demand as companions, especially among the young. These are rather avoided and shunned, as slow and stupid, unsocial and uncongenial. And the rich, the gay, the good-looking, the fashionable, and the witty, present far more numerous attractions, and are far more eagerly sought after. And this plainly declares the state of soul of those who are more influenced by these worldly attractions than by what is sterling and enduring. "Like draws to like," and their preference for what is showy and entertaining, rather than for what is genuine and improving, intimates a soul as yet unvisited by the grace of God, yet carnal and sensual, yet walking after the course of this world, and in danger of

perishing everlastingly. We have no wish to speak slightingly of any qualities of mind, body, or estate, which render people attractive, and their acquaintance pleasing and profitable. These, when coupled with deep religious principle, are most valuable additions, and to be highly prized. But they are not the only thing, nor the chief thing. And what we deprecate is having regard to these alone, while the question of moral and religious character is almost entirely lost sight of. That is the rock on which many a goodly vessel has split and gone down. That is one of the most fruitful sources of our family and social miseries, persons being attracted to one another as moths are attracted to a candle, merely by a shining and sparkling exterior, and discovering their error only when, like the moth, they are severely scorched, if not killed.

Depend upon it, if we attempt to build our domestic or social happiness on any other foundation than what God has shown to us, yielding ourselves up to the wayward and short-sighted fancies of our corrupt nature, we shall pay dearly for it before long. "A companion of fools shall be destroyed." Remorse and misery will certainly ensue, and we will be compelled to acknowledge, as the teaching of a bitter experience, that we have grievously erred in not assigning the principal place to moral and spiritual qualities in the friendships we have formed.

The character which our God and Saviour would have us take up with consists principally of two elements—

1. *The fear of God.* "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee."

By *fear* of God here is not meant *terror* of God. The wicked, against whom you are being warned, may often have that fear, even as the devils have; and, under the influence of it, they strive to banish all thought of God. "They are troubled at His presence; when they consider,

they are afraid" (Job xxiii. 15). The fear of God here means deep reverence of God, arising from faith and love to Him, and is the commonest expression in the Old Testament for genuine piety, a heart that is right with God, which loves and honours Him. It is what is described, in New Testament language, on this wise, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage, again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." The fear of God here intended can exist only in a soul which has been reconciled to God, through faith in His Son, and which has learnt to regard God as a gracious and loving Father. And this is what it behoves us to look for, first and foremost, in those who shall be safe and profitable companions. Are they among God's redeemed? Do they love the Saviour? Are they fully awake to the transcendent importance of spiritual and eternal things? In a word, do they walk with God? And if so, they will make the best company to walk with us. But there is a second element in this character.

2. *Keeping God's precepts.* "I am a companion of them that keep Thy precepts."

This element is the complement of the other. The fear of God is the inward moving principle, and belongs to the hidden man of the heart. But it has its outcome, known and read of all men, and this is the form it takes. It keeps God's precepts. They who have the fear of God are exemplary in word and deed. They seek to walk in all the commandments of the Lord blameless, seeking to please God, and to benefit their neighbour, doing justly, and loving mercy, and walking humbly with their God.

And let no one speak slightingly of a character made up of these two elements. It is modelled on Christ's character, on God's holy image, and ought to be to us the most interesting and attractive object we can find on

earth. There is both solidity and endurance in it, and it will bless us, both for time and eternity, to be associated with it.

II. *In choosing his companions, the Psalmist did not restrict himself to those of any particular rank or wordly circumstances.* "ALL" of this character were to be his companions. "I am a companion of all them," etc. His selection was regulated solely by *character*, and not by any adventitious circumstances of rank, or birth, or anything else.

And, seeing that the speaker was a *king*, this is all the more remarkable; for none are so jealous and exclusive in the matter of friendships as those of royal blood. They may *condescend* to men of low degree, and show them some marks of attention, intended to be chronicled for universal admiration, but they will not make "companions" of such persons, and would resent it as an insult to have such a name even so much as spoken of in connection with them. Their companions must be of their own caste, their own rank and station. But David had got above all these worldly predilections and prejudices. Like God Himself, he looked not upon the outward part at all. His only concern was about *character*, and wherever he recognized the grand outstanding features of those whom God loves and honours, there he recognized a *companion*, one with whom he was not ashamed to consort, let his outward circumstances be ever so lowly. "I am a companion of ALL them that fear God."

And that this was no mere romantic sentiment, a pious affectation, unsupported by sober fact, is abundantly proved by David's life and writings. I suppose that then, as now, the greater number of those possessing the character here described were to be found in the lowly walks of life.

And, in his writings, what an intimacy does David show with the circumstances and feelings of the pious poor! "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Ps. xxxiv. 6). "The wicked, in his pride, doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices they have imagined" (Ps. x. 2). "The poor committeth himself unto Thee; Thou art the helper of the fatherless" (ver. 14). And so on, in many similar instances, evincing the most kindly feeling and concern, entering into the lot of the pious poor with all the heartfelt sympathy of a close companion.

We have here, my friends, a test of nobleness of soul—to be able, like David, to overlook all conventional distinctions, and to lay hold on the real man beneath, to admire a character fashioned in the mould of heaven, as much in the poor man as in one of royal blood. This nobility, of course, is witnessed in highest perfection in God Himself. The world may still be deceived by ornament, but He is not. He looketh not upon the outward part. He looks straight through all externals, and fastens upon the heart—upon the position of the affections towards Himself, and the things unseen and eternal; and that being the sole object of His regard, it frequently happens that the things which are highly esteemed among men are an abomination with Him. And, as we advance in the likeness of God, in the same proportion will our method of judging assimilate to His, rising more and more above the dominion of things seen and temporal, and fastening our supreme regard upon moral and spiritual qualities. We shall be able to enter into the spirit of our poet in his contrasted picture of Voltaire and the humble cottager:—

> "Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
> Pillow and bobbins, all her little store;
> Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
> Shuffling her threads about the livelong day,

Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light;
She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
Has little understanding and no wit;
Receives no praise; but though her lot be such
(Toilsome and indigent), she renders much;
Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;
And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes
Her title to a treasure in the skies.
O happy peasant! O unhappy bard!
His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward;
He praised, perhaps, for ages yet to come,
She never heard of half a mile from home;
He lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
She safe in the simplicity of hers."

"The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."

And with how much deeper an interest should we move about among men, if we were looking upon them, with senses exercised to discern simply the good and the evil; to see only the two great companies that shall be seen, on the Great Day, the one on the right hand and the other on the left! The weak things of the world, and the things which are despised, should then be ofttimes noble and reverent in our sight—kings and priests in disguise, the disguise ofttimes being humble enough, like some earthly kings that we read about in history, wandering about as cowherds and beggars. But their lowly guise will be no offence to us. Seeing that they fear God, and keep His precepts, we know that they are of the blood royal, and that though it doth not yet appear what they shall be, they shall, in due time, be manifested to be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

III. *David openly and fearlessly avowed his preference for this class of people: "I am a companion," etc.*

Here we have two things implied :—

1. *He was not ashamed of them.*

Appear in what guise they may—high or low, rich or poor—if they feared God and kept His precepts, he cleaved to them with his whole soul, and heeded not though the whole world knew that he was their companion. And such fearlessness is begotten only by the deepest and purest principle, by a sublime disregard of everything except what God approves of. And it is to be feared that even God's own people are not exempt from the temptation of being ashamed of their humbler brethren and sisters in Christ, recognizing them but doubtfully, and going to them, if they go at all, as Nicodemus went to Jesus, secretly for fear of the Jews. They fear being thought the companions of the godly, lest the world's witlings should point their sarcasms at them. But should we not strive to rise clear above all such moral cowardice and littleness? What so worthy of being acknowledged as the image of Jesus! And if we be ashamed of His people, are we not ashamed of Himself? And you know what He says about being ashamed of Him before men. He will be ashamed of such, when they come to stand at His judgment bar.

It was an illustrious example of condescension that was set by the mighty king of Israel, to declare himself the companion of every one that is godly, and is worthy of all imitation. But what is it to Jesus' own example in the same particular? He is not ashamed to call us "brethren," and if we be true to Him, He will acknowledge us before His Father and before His angels.

2. *It is deducible, from this avowal, that his experience approved his choice.*

He is not speaking of what he had in contemplation, and regarding which he might possibly be mistaken, but

about what he had practised for long, and had the fullest experience of. It is not, "I purpose being a companion of them that fear the Lord, or I think I should be so," but "I *am* a companion," etc. "I speak of that which I know, and testify of that which I have seen."

Many *think* they ought to break with companions of lax views and dissolute habits, and that they ought to feel more drawn to such as fear the Lord, and keep His precepts; but, beyond vague wishes and inoperative resolves, it comes to nothing. They are always *going* to be something better, but they have never the courage to come out and be separate, and to cast in their lot with the people of God, saying, "I *am* a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts."

But if they would actually join this company, as the Psalmist did, they would never regret it. They would see how the Lord is with them, and doing them good. Their ways are ways of pleasantness, and all their paths are peace. They are a pilgrim band, not very sumptuously appointed always, and not very imposing to look at, but they have no fear about being supplied with all that they really need by the way; and very pleasant is their converse about the things laid up for them, about the country whither they are going; and, above all, about the King of that country—the blessed Saviour, who is beckoning them on, and who has gone before them to prepare a place for them, and who is coming again to receive them unto Himself.

There are three aspects in which I should like you to regard the subject I have now been treating of.

1. As containing a solemn word of warning especially to the young; to those who are just entering, or have recently entered, on the active duties of life. Believe me, my dear young friends, although your knowledge of your

own hearts may be very imperfect as yet, you have quite enough of evil within you to contend with, without having it reinforced by evil company. If you have taken part with Christ, you will find that the enemies of your own household—the corrupt inclinations of your own hearts—will demand all your time and vigilance to keep them down; and they will prove too much for you if you lend them the aid of evil companions from without. We have no wish to deprive you of any enjoyment which is safe. We do not look for your exhibiting all the gravity of age in your walk and conversation. But we believe that God's world, and that the godly and virtuous part of society, supply pleasure in abundance, of an innocent and healthful and ennobling kind, to satisfy all the requirements of youth, without their requiring to stray into forbidden paths, where the destroyer lies in wait to ruin both body and soul. You will have, no doubt, much obloquy to encounter in adhering to the Psalmist's choice; but look to the end, and take courage. See these emissaries of evil bringing down the gray hairs of their parents with sorrow to the grave; see them blasting all their own prospects of usefulness and respectability in this world, and hastening to an undone eternity. Yours is the good part, and they will acknowledge it at the last. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

2. I propose this subject to all as a test of Christian discipleship.

It is a common and a just saying, that a man is known by the company he keeps; and if we be Christ's, it will manifest itself in the sort of company we keep. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples," said Christ, "if ye have love one to another." "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren." "In this the children of God are manifest, and the chil-

dren of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." But if we studiously shun the society of those who take most interest in spiritual things, and have no kind of relish for either their conversation or doings, it tells very unfavourably on the state of our own souls, and should lead us seriously to reflect how it is with us. Are we not still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity?

3. I would propose this subject of right companionship as a means of grace to all Christ's own people.

Paul had a great desire to be *filled* with the company of the Roman Christians; and when they met him at Apii Forum, he thanked God, and took courage. And few things are better fitted to *fill* the soul, and to refresh and encourage it, than the society of those who can converse intelligently about spiritual matters, and out of a real and living experience. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise;" and "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Books are all very well when nothing better can be had; but the living epistle has a penetrating and quickening influence about it which a book has not; and if they who fear the Lord would speak often one to another, as they did in ancient times, they would be surprised at the amount of good that would result from it. They would acknowledge the correctness of the wise man's saying, "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel" (Prov. xxvii. 9).

And not only does it beguile and smooth the way to have company of this sort, but it will greatly enhance the joys of heaven to have companions there in glory, who were first companions with us in temptations, and tribulations, and toils. There are no firmer and faster friendships than between old soldiers, who have fought shoulder

to shoulder on foreign fields, and "drank from the same canteen," as one of the American war songs has it, or between colonists who have come out in the same ship together. And the eternal friendships of heaven will be all the deeper and sweeter if they have begun on earth, and can recall the time when they were companions in arms, or endured together the dangers of the midway passage. If each of us could truly say now, "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee," we should be companions of them still when they stand before the Lamb in white robes, and with palms in their hands, praising Him who has redeemed them with His own blood, and made them kings and priests unto God. Amen.

XI.

*THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.**

"How is it that ye do not discern this time?"—LUKE xii. 56.

MET together as we are at this time, not only on the first Sabbath, but on the first day of another year, it is surely matter of deep and hearty congratulation to every one of us, that God, in His infinite mercy, has preserved us thus far, and is permitting us to praise Him in the land of the living, while so many among us and around us have been called to their account. And I earnestly trust that this great boon, which the Lord is bestowing upon us, will be rightly appreciated and duly improved by us. Our text relates to some who were very insensible of how highly they were privileged in this respect. The Lord had honoured them to live in one of the most momentous epochs in the history of the world—no such epoch had gone before, and there has been none such since. Crowds of Old Testament prophecies were being fulfilled before them. God's Son was in the flesh among them, uttering the wisdom of God, and showing forth the mighty power of God. And these men were living utterly insensible to the momentous character of the events transpiring around them, and as if the time were one of the most commonplace which had ever existed,

* Preached on New Year's Day, 1865.

and which had no special interest for intelligent and responsible beings. Christ blames them for their want of discernment. "How is it that ye do not discern this time?" And on what ground were they blameworthy? Why, upon this ground, that they might have discerned the character of the time, had they made an honest and diligent use of the means within their reach. Some few had made use of these means, and had come to know the marvellous character of the time, and were in an attitude of "waiting for the consolation of Israel," ere ever the Messiah appeared. They had the Word of God, with its burden of prophecies, determining the time by many clear and infallible signs. The sceptre had departed from Judah. The seventy weeks of Daniel were drawing to a close. The great awakening attending the Baptist's ministry was a sure prognostic that the Messiah Himself was at hand. And many other signs, both in the religious and political world, too numerous to mention, were distinctly before the people's eyes, and they had the key to them in the Word of God; and, though some had wisdom to understand, the vast majority neither saw, nor cared to see, any trace of God's finger, nor any fulfilments of His Word in the events which were occurring before their eyes. And Christ blames them for their ignorance and insensibility. But they heeded not His warning, and persisted in viewing the time as having nothing remarkable about it, and as having no special connection with the oracles of God, and they were not undeceived till it was too late. Their cry was "peace and safety," when, lo! sudden destruction came upon them, and they found no escape.

Now, I hesitate not, on the strength of this and many similar passages of Scripture, to charge it as a sin on Christ's professing people, if they be negligent in discerning

the signs of their time in the light of God's Holy Word. All the events of time are strictly subservient to the evolution of God's plan of mercy to a guilty and perishing world. The government is upon Christ's shoulders. He is head over all things to the Church. And all the movements and enterprises among men, whether political, social, or commercial, are under the direction of Christ, who never for a moment ceases to mould and direct all things, in every department of human thought and action, for the final discomfiture of His enemies, and the undisputed sovereignty of His kingdom over every people, and tongue, and nation. Now these activities of mankind, in nearly every department, but especially in the political, occupy no inconsiderable part of God's Word. Human history, in its dim, yet plainly discernible outline, is a portion of revelation; and we are exhorted to give heed to it, and are encouraged to study it by many blessings and rewards held out to us. Alas for the spirit and character of that professor who takes no interest in how far God's purpose of mercy is evolved; and who would rudely silence the brother who would ask, "Watchman, what of the night?" The evolution of these plans is what sits closest to the heart of Christ, and strange and unnatural would it be were His followers to take no interest in it, and especially when He has furnished them with the means of marking all the great eventful turnings and leading milestones on that long and chequered road along which the human race is marching to its destiny.

Let not this sin be chargeable upon us. Let us not fall into the same condemnation as those that we here read of. Let us consider the signs of the times; and let us not be deterred from the duty by the bad odour in which it is held in many quarters. Worldly men make rare sport of considering the signs of the times from a Scriptural point of view. *They* are willing to look at them from every

other point, and they are never weary in doing so. But all their opinions, from their point of view, are worthless, and all their calculations and predictions are being continually falsified. There is no sure guide but the word of prophecy, shining as a light in a dark place; and they who come in the right spirit to the study of it shall not fail to see the light. We do not seek to conceal, but rather to give the greatest prominence to the fact that the study is beset with many dangers, and that not a few have gone widely astray in it. But what part of God's Word have men not gone astray about? And I have yet to learn that we are at liberty to ignore and shun any department of Christian duty because it is beset with unusual difficulties and dangers. There is grace promised for every time of need. And if the prophetic Scriptures are studied in a humble, and patient, and prayerful spirit, all the instruction and comfort they are designed to convey will assuredly be imparted.

You must be well aware that a very large number of the most pious, the most learned, and sober-minded of Scripture expositors in the present day are unanimous in regarding *this time* as the threshold of the most important that has been from the creation. I do not say that they are, by any means, at one respecting the exact nature of the events which appear to be at the door. Far from it, the differences are both wide and many; and on such a subject it could hardly fail to be otherwise. But as to the bare fact of events, of the most solemn and momentous description, being at hand, I am not aware that there is any difference of opinion among the whole multitude of those who are earnestly applying themselves to the subject. And it seems to me to be no unfitting exercise for the opening day of a new year, in this eventful time, to consider some of the grounds on which this widespread

belief is based, and to look around the horizon, in the earnest hope of discovering some certain indication of what watch of the night it is, and how long it may yet be till the day dawn and the shadows flee away.

In connection with this subject, then, I select the following six particulars as being specially worthy of notice:—

I. The fourth kingdom of Daniel, has assumed its last phase.

It was revealed to Daniel, first by an image composed of four metals, and afterwards by four beasts rising out of the sea, that four great kingdoms or empires would succeed each other upon earth, each bearing almost universal sway while it lasted, and that at the close of the fourth kingdom a new order of things would be supernaturally introduced; and which is represented, in the case of the image, by a stone cut out without hands, smiting the image, and becoming itself a great mountain, filling the whole earth; and in the case of the four beasts, by one "like the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, and receiving from 'the ancient of days' dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him." The fourth kingdom (legs of iron), as every student of prophecy knows, is the Roman empire. And the prophecy respecting it is that this kingdom should be divided; and for these divisions we are directed to the ten toes of the image, corresponding to the ten horns of the fourth beast. And the Roman empire, you know, was actually so divided into ten kingdoms, and which still exist on the continent of Europe. But the prophet directs attention specially to the last phase of these ten kingdoms; and the picture is a very strange one. The toes and feet are part of iron and part of clay; but the prophet notes that these materials won't cohere, nor unite into one con-

sistent mass. And what is his explanation of it? The iron he has already explained. It is the symbol of hard, grinding, crushing despotism and brute force. "The fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces, and subdueth all things, and as iron, that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise." But what is the *clay?* It is explained to be "the seed of men;" and the word for men, in the Hebrew, is a word which exclusively signifies "men of low degree"—*vulgaris* of Romans, the lower orders, the populace. "And whereas," says the prophet, "thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay." And so, in the last days of the ten toe kingdoms, we may expect to find the despotic principle of the iron endeavouring to ally itself with the democratic aspirations of the miry clay. The despots and the peoples will vainly strive to construct forms of government in which they may work together, and so as that each party may enjoy what they consider to be their due. But the attempts will not succeed. The iron will not amalgamate with the clay. Despotism and democracy will not hold together. Now what the prophecy predicts has not been seen till these last days. But there is no mistaking it. The closest and haughtiest despotisms of Europe have yielded to the pressure, and every one of them has some admixture of the popular element, some show of a parliament, some pretence of admitting the people to a share of their government. And our short-sighted politicians are loud in their mutual congratulations of what they consider to be the progress of "constitutional government." But the student of God's Word looks on the phenomenon with other eyes. It is to him a notable sign of the time, and of what watch of night it is. The iron and the miry clay are striving to

mingle in the kingdoms, and how long the experiment may go on we cannot say, but it cannot be very long; and *thousands of years ago* the experiment was predicted to fail. The iron and the clay will not mix; and the attempt is the immediate prelude to the complete destruction of all these kingdoms, that a kingdom may be set up that shall never be moved; or, as the prophet expresses it, "The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him."

II. All the great prophetic numbers are on the eve of expiring.

The prophecies contain dates. In Daniel you have several, the more remarkable being a period of 2,300 days, another of 1,335 days, another of 1,290 days, and another of 1,260 days, which last number is found in the Revelation, under the name of "forty and two months," and also as 1,260 days (the same as in Daniel). Now I do not mean to enter here on a detailed examination of these periods, neither as to when they began, nor when they terminate. The subject is more for the patient investigations of the study, with many books of reference around you, than for the hasty expositions of the pulpit. I would despair of your following me through all the intricate questions necessarily involved in this inquiry. I would just remark that these periods expressed in days are generally accepted as signifying as many years. The strongest argument I know for this, and which appears to me conclusive, is that *one* of these periods of Daniel, expressed in weeks, must be taken as signifying as many years as there are days in these weeks. *Gabriel* told him that, from the command

being issued to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince should be cut off, but not for himself, seventy weeks were determined (*i.e.* 490 days). Now as literal days the prophecy did not hold good, but as years it did. The decree to rebuild Jerusalem was issued by Artaxerxes, as you read in the book of Nehemiah, on the first day of the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of his reign; and from that time to the crucifixion, when Messiah was cut off, was exactly 490 years. And it seems a just and sound conclusion, therefore, that all periods similarly expressed, and especially those in the same book of Daniel, are to be explained on the same principle.

Now it is the opinion of all who have made these numbers their special study, that they are very near their close. They seem all to terminate together. They begin, of course, at different periods, but they seem all to converge and come to a close at once. The longest period of 2,300 years seems to include all the others. They are just bits and slices of that great epoch, and which includes the whole period of Gentile domination. It began not long after Daniel's own time, and by the most careful reckoning a very few years more will bring us to the close of it. And the close of it is a grand crisis in the world's history, involving changes in the present constitution of things, the magnitude and importance of which we can only very dimly anticipate.

III. The Mohammedan or Turkish power is very far exhausted.

And what, you say, has this to do as a sign of the time? I reply, Much every way. There is not one point in the book of Revelation, regarding which interpreters are so much at one, as in the explanations they give of the sixth trumpet and the sixth vial. The sixth trumpet describes

the rise of a great power to be a scourge of God, and the sixth vial removes it out of the way. In both cases the river Euphrates is the symbol. The sixth trumpet lets loose "four angels," as they are termed, *i.e.*, four messengers or instrumentalities ordained of God; "four angels," bound in the river Euphrates, and about which all are agreed that they mean the four great Mohammedan nations, which entered into an alliance, and crossed the Euphrates, on the other side of which they had been hitherto kept, destroying from off the earth every vestige of the then apostate churches of Asia and the east of Europe, and which had been planted by the hands of apostles themselves. And the sixth vial predicts that this devastating flood of the Euphrates is to be dried up. It is to waste away by a slow but steady consumption. And all who know anything of the history of Turkish dominion, during the last forty years, must be well aware how remarkably this prediction is being fulfilled. Every effort and sacrifice has been made by ourselves, in conjunction with France and some lesser powers, to prop up this tottering dynasty. But there is no sustaining of dynasties foredoomed of God. In spite of all our skill and all our remedies, "the sick man" is getting feebler among our hands; and the time of his dissolution cannot be long postponed. And his death is connected with great events, the character of which I do not at present attempt to explain. But thus they read in the mystic language of the book: "The sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates, and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the East might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of

the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

IV. The interest which is everywhere being awakened in the Jewish race. They are acquiring a degree of prominence in the eyes of the nations, which they have not had these many hundred years.

There is no matter included in unfulfilled prophecy, about which biblical students speak more confidently, than about the restoration of the seed of Abraham to their own land. If we know anything certain regarding the future, it is surely this. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Three thousand three hundred and seventy-eight years ago God made over the land of Canaan to Abraham and to his seed for ever: "I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Gen. xvii. 8). And how far has that promise been fulfilled? Why, during these 3,378 years, since the deed of inheritance was ratified, the seed of Abraham have occupied the land together, *as one people*, only 730 years. And wherefore has the fulfilment of the promise been so partial and fragmentary? It was intimated from the outset, that they held the land conditionally. It would indeed be theirs for ever; there was no condition as regards that. But, if they failed in allegiance to their heavenly King, He would punish them long and terribly. And this was to be the manner of the punishment, "*If* thou wilt not hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, *to* keep His commandments, the Lord shall send thee curs*ing*, and vexation, and rebuke, in all thou settest thine h*and* unto; and thou shalt be smitten before thine ene*mies*,

nd shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth" Deut. xxviii.). The whole world has been witness these ,800 years, how literally and how fearfully that curse as been verified. The Jews are before us a standing niracle to the truth of the Bible. They have outlived hat would have swamped and obliterated every other eople, and they are, at this day, as separate and distinct race, though scattered in thousands of fragments over he whole world, as they were when they dwelt in their wn land under David or Solomon. And what are they hus miraculously preserved for? The same word which redicted their present state informs us of the reason why. God's covenant with their fathers must stand. His gift nd calling are without repentance. "Lo, the days come, aith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my eople Israel and Judah, and I will cause them to return to he land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess t." The prophetic Scriptures are full of such statements s these. And, mark you, it is both "Israel and Judah" hat are to be restored, the ten tribes, as well as the two. udah and Benjamin have been before our eyes ever since hey were expelled the land, 1,800 years ago. But where ave been the ten tribes, which were carried away captive nore than 2,600 years ago? The prediction with respect o the ten tribes was that the Lord would "remove them ut of His sight;" *i.e.*, they would be hid from the rest of nankind, and especially from those professing the true eligion. And so effectually have they been hid, that it as long been the practice to speak of them as the "*ten ost tribes*," and the infidel has often taunted us with what e considered a clear case of the failure of prophecy. But he words of the Lord are sure words. These ten tribes xist. And, coincident with the ten tribes coming to light, here will be, as there is, a visible shaking among the dry

bones of the two tribes of the last dispersion—the two tribes which rejected and crucified the Messiah. They are rousing from their long sleep of apathy and indifference in regard to each other; and, as is well known to all who are attending to it, they are sending deputations, and letters, and mutual greetings, and encouragements through all the countries of their dispersion; and, as a whole people, they are at the present moment inspired with ardent expectations that the Lord is about to do some great thing for them. The blasted fig tree is perceptibly budding, and it is a notable sign for all who contemplate the world's future from the standpoint of God's Word. The return of the old predestined race to their own land is not a solitary event, but has many dread concomitants. It was with a strong hand and a stretched forth arm, and with many plagues on the Egyptians, that God brought them from captivity at first; and these were but faint types of the vials of wrath which are to be poured on all the Gentiles among whom they are at present scattered, when, in the words of the prophet, "The Lord shall set His hand the second time to recover the remnant of His people . . . from the four corners of the earth." "For, behold, in those days, saith the Lord, and at that time when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down unto the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people, and for my heritage, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land." And again, referring to the same period, "Behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain."

V. The spiritual and moral condition of the nations which profess to be Christian.

The whole of Europe, with the exception of between two and three millions of Turks, professes to be Christian. Every country has its Church and what claim to be Christian ordinances. But how far are all these countries really and truly Christian? The picture is an exceedingly mournful one. We doubt not, and have good evidence for believing, that in every part of Europe there are little companies of truly Christian men and women, who are holding the truth of the Gospel in all its purity, and whose lives adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour. But what is this so-called Christendom, as a whole? He would be a bold man who could maintain that its name is anything better than a mockery. The southern countries of Europe are all sunk in the superstitions and idolatries of popery, while the public morality is no better than it was under Paganism. The eastern portions of Europe, as Russia and the peoples of the Lower Danube, are equally far gone in the idolatries and profanities of the Greek Church. The central and western nations of Europe, though many of them profess to be Protestant, are much more correctly *infidel*, religion among them having been converted into a species of philosophy, which has eaten away all the vitals of the Gospel. In Britain alone, among all the countries of Europe, is the purely Christian element to be discerned with any distinctness; and even here there is very much to forbid us speaking with any degree of exultation. Who can look, without anxiety, on the great and powerful Church of England being so rapidly overrun, partly by the superstitions of popery, and partly by the most unblushing infidelity among the highest of her teachers? And, even when our churches are tolerably sound in doctrine, and scriptural in their outward framework, how

little of the real life of the Gospel is to be found among them! What really is the great bulk of our congregations, but just little patches of the wicked world under a Christian name? They are not a "peculiar people." The line of separation between them and the world, in temper, and pursuits, and habits, is so faint in most cases as not to be discernible. The sound Christian element is but as a handful of wheat in many bushels of chaff.

And what does all this mean? What does it portend? I answer that it is the precursor of judgment. On what condition was the Gospel given to the Gentiles, when it was taken from the Jews, and they given over to blindness and a reprobate mind? Hear the word of the Lord to us Gentiles: "Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off that I might be graffed in. Well: because of unbelief they were broken off; and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee. Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, *if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou shalt be cut off.*" That is the doom of apostate Christendom, and for which it is fast ripening. *It is* to be cut off, and by such judgments as there never were since the world began. How different a prospect from the dreams of progress, and improvement, and reform, which are cherished by many who judge by the light of their own carnal minds, and not by the true sayings of God!

VI. The last peculiarity of this time which I mention is the widespread expectation which exists, that we are nearing the period of Christ's second coming.

That such an expectation is very widely spread throughout all churches is a fact too notorious to be denied by

ly who are giving the slightest attention to the Christian erature of the time. It is no vagary of fanaticism—no ude fancy flung off from ignorance and heated feelings. it multitudes of the most learned, most sober-minded, d industrious expositors of Scripture, although com-encing the inquiry with strong prejudices against such idea, have found themselves shut up to the belief, that e day of Christ's second coming is near at hand, yea, rhaps at the very door; and that this wide-spread pectation of the event is no other than the wise virgins sponding to the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh: o ye forth to meet Him."

You are aware that I am one of those who have embraced his view; and, from time to time, as occasion offers, I lay before you some of the grounds by which I have been led to it; in the expectation that you will examine the matter for yourselves, and embrace it, and derive from it the same spiritual benefit which I have done myself. I can make no attempt at present to open up these grounds. I am simply pointing you to this expectation as a notable sign of the time, and I am not particularly called upon to discuss whether the expectation be well founded or not. An expectation, of course, may be wholly groundless and delusive. And yet it is not to be regarded as wholly without weight in dealing with this question. Its very prevalence should make all of us think twice before we reject it, and should, in fact, dispose every one to inquire seriously into it. We know that, when the Lord is about to do some great thing for His Church, He stirs up His people to expect it, and to pray for it. We know, from history, what a wide-spread expectation there was of a Divine deliverer immediately before Christ came the first time — an expectation which was not confined to the worshippers of the true God, but which had in some

mysterious manner found its way into heathen minds as well, as the ancient literature of the world abundantly testifies. And neither is this expectation of the present day confined to the Christian part of mankind; but, as our missionaries and others are repeatedly informing us, there is, at the present time, an expectation all over the East, and very specially among the idolaters of India and China, that ere long a celestial deliverer is to appear among them. I ask no one to believe the thing on the ground of these vague expectations. But I say that no one who knows anything of God's past dealings with the Church and the world will make light of these expectations, and will look upon them otherwise than as a solemn call to look into this matter, and to see whether or no this wide and earnest expectation may not be the day dawning and the day star arising in the heart, heralding that glorious day for which all creation is groaning and travailing in pain.

I have thus, dear friends, very briefly and imperfectly glanced at a few of those signs of our time which are particularly engaging the attention of a very large number of the closest students of God's Word. I may in a few sentences repeat them: And (1) the fourth and last great Gentile monarchy, predicted by Daniel, is exhibiting the characteristic assigned to it, immediately preceding its final destruction. The ten kingdoms of the Roman earth are striving hard to commingle the iron and the clay; *i.e.*, as the prophet himself explains it, the despotic principle and the aspirations of the peoples, the absolute and the revolutionary elements. And (2) all the great prophetic numbers are converging upon a point which cannot be many years distant. We are still within the scope of the dates of prophecy. But in a few years we shall have

passed the point where they all determine, and beyond which we have no clue to guide us. And (3) the opening event of the sixth vial is being enacted before our eyes. The mystical Euphrates—the Turkish power, the once mighty scourge of God, and the Eastern apostate churches—is fast being dried up, to prepare the way for the destruction of the mystic Babylon, the apostate churches of the West. And (4) the Jewish race is emerging from their long indifference as regards their nationality. There is a shaking among the dry bones. The whole people is astir, and casting wistful looks towards the land given to their fathers. And (5) the churches of the Gentiles seem very nearly to have attained that degree of degeneracy and apostacy when they must be cut off, and be spued as an unclean thing out of Christ's mouth. I concur with those expositors who regard the messages to the seven churches in Asia as being as much prophetic as any part of the book. These seven churches are selected out of the many churches in Asia, and are arranged in that particular order because they produced a faithful picture of Christendom from first to last—from the purity and fervour of apostolic days exhibited in the church of Ephesus, down through the darkness of popery, in the church of Thyatira, with its mystic woman Jezebel, and her fornication and sorceries, till we reach the final aspect of Christendom in the lukewarm church of Laodicea—the church which imagined herself rich and increased with goods, when she was poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked,—the church concerning which Christ says, "So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth"—the doom which we believe is now impending over Christendom. And (6), and lastly, a very considerable portion of Christ's people are strongly of opinion that the epoch of Christ's return in glory is very

near at hand. The day and the hour few pretend to hint at. But that it is "the time of the end," very many are convinced. And this conviction, begotten of patient and prayerful study of God's Word, is strangely echoed in all the great heathen lands by a similar conviction in the minds of their teeming populations, and how or whence it has come to them they cannot tell.

Now, my dear friends, I can form no idea how these things may affect you, nor with what amount of attention and interest you may be disposed to regard them. They may, as in my own case, dispose you to scan this time, and all that is transpiring around us, with a peculiar watchfulness and solemnity; or they may appear to you to be mere vagaries—crude and unfounded fancies, which admit of being predicated of almost any time, and which shall not be allowed to be associated, in your minds at least, with the awfully solemn and supernatural events which I have indicated. If that be your view, you are, of course, as fully at liberty to hold it, as I am to hold mine. I would just say, "Be sure you hold it scripturally." It is a matter of no moment what any of us think, if our thinking be not derived from the materials of God's Word. And I would just say further to all who may differ from me, that if it turn out that I am right and you are wrong, you will, of course, remember that the judgments of the last time have not overtaken you unawares; and that you cannot turn round upon me, and charge me with having incurred the doom of the unfaithful watchmen in Israel, of whom it is written, "If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand" (Ezek. xxxiii. 6).

I submit my views to you as claiming to be based on the Scriptural authorities, to which I have briefly referred you, and which I invite and urge you to examine yet more fully for yourselves; for I have little fear but that you would come to be substantially of one mind with me, if, like the good Bereans, that you read of in the Acts, you would search the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so.

And let no one imagine that this will prove a study barren and unfruitful in the graces, and labours, and sacrifices, of the Christian character. I know no study better fitted, in the case of God's own child, and under the superintendence of the Holy Ghost, to disengage the mind from frivolous and perishable pursuits, and to awaken and sustain in it the expanding and ennobling motives which purify and glorify the spirit of man, urging him on the one hand to occupy and work while it is called to-day, and on the other, cheering and upholding him in the darkest and bitterest hours, by the near prospect of that unclouded day, when all old things shall have passed away, and all things shall have become new. Amen.

LECTURES.

I.

JACOB'S DREAM.

"And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran; and he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night," etc.—GEN. xxviii. 10—22.

ALL of us, I suppose, are familiar with the circumstances which brought Jacob into the lonely and forlorn situation described in the opening part of this passage. The unwise partiality displayed respectively by Isaac and Rebecca for their two sons—Isaac's partiality for Esau, and Rebecca's for Jacob—had at length begun to yield its bitter fruit, as all such partialities will sooner or later do. As early, at least, as the time when Jacob thought to precipitate the fulfilment of the Divine counsels by inducing his brother to sell his birthright, a deep-rooted enmity had sprung up in Esau's mind against his brother, and it was no doubt ever and anon venting itself in a variety of unbrotherly acts, subversive of all domestic peace and comfort. And things grew only worse and worse as time advanced, and at last reached a crisis when their now blind and bedridden father expressed his resolve, notwithstanding the Divine decree to the contrary, to confer the blessing on his favourite son, and was making preparations accord-

ingly. Rebecca, like most people of little faith when an emergency arrives, was all agitation and alarm. She could not leave it to God to protect the integrity of His own decree, but thought she must needs hasten to His help with whatever carnal device came readiest to hand. We know the stratagem, in which she found Jacob only too easy an accomplice, and by which Jacob, through personating Esau, obtained the blessing. Esau, finding himself supplanted a second time, was heard muttering threats of deadly vengeance against his brother, and which filled Rebecca with the greatest alarm for the safety of her favourite. He was in peril of his life, and like many other mothers in the case of unwisely indulged sons, she was glad to send him away to a distant land, in search of a precarious livelihood, in case some worse thing might befall him at home.

He had to flee to "the land of the people of the east," as it is called, in quest of his uncle Laban; and very different was this embassy from that which had previously passed between the two families, when Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac. There was then a goodly company, attended by every evidence of affluence and dignity. But Jacob is alone; the staff in his hand is all in the world he can call his own, and the desolation around him was only a faint emblem of the desolation within him. He had discovered now that the way of transgressors is hard; his conscience was upbraiding him; the past was crowded with sorrowful recollections of a once pleasant home, now desolated and distracted; his present had no sign of comfort for him, and his future was all darkness and uncertainty. But His erring servant's extremity was God's opportunity; the commencement of *his* trials, as in the case of so many more, was also the commencement of those gracious communications from heaven which made

him a new man, and a worthy example to be studied by God's Church in all generations.

When about fifty miles from his father's house, we read here (ver. 11) that "he lighted upon a certain place"—a place, the external appearance of which, as travellers assure us, has changed very little from the night that Jacob came upon it—a very desolate place, with no sign of vegetation, and encumbered all over with huge loose blocks of stone, that look like as if they had been the fragments of some other world fallen from the sky. In this desolate place Jacob, overcome with fatigue, lay down to sleep, with his head pillowed on one of the stones around him. And as he slept, he had a dream, no ordinary dream of the night, but one of the dreams with which God of old communicated with men; a Divine revelation, in short. "Behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven."

It is doubtful if what Jacob saw was literally what we call a "ladder." The original term points to something cast up to a towering height, as if a mountain were to rise out of the ground and pierce the clouds. The verb from which the noun comes occurs repeatedly in the Old Testament, and always in this sense; *e.g.*, "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way" (Isa. lxii. 10); "Cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly" (Jer. l. 26). The idea, however, of successive terraces, one above another, somewhat resembling the steps of a stair, is very likely part of the symbol, and what Jacob saw.

The old Jewish commentators took the same view of the word as I have now referred to, but made a further addition to it, which may be altogether fanciful, but yet deserves, I think, to be noted. Their idea was that the pile which Jacob saw consisted of four storeys, as it were, corresponding to the four Gentile monarchies that we read of

in Daniel; and the conclusion that they came to was that Jacob's dream was in one aspect of it *prophetic*, portraying the whole period from Jacob's time until God's kingdom should come on earth, and that word be fulfilled which in this connection would have a remarkable significance: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." *

But I am not disposed to lay any great weight upon this method of interpreting the vision; although, at the same time, it may not be out of place to remark that the great outline of the things concerning the bringing in of God's kingdom, as most fully detailed in the prophecies of Daniel, occur far more frequently in Scripture than most readers are aware of, or would readily credit.

Adhering to the one principal fact that, whether it were mountain or ladder, Jacob saw a *pathway of communication between heaven and earth*, I proceed now to state and illustrate some of the instructions and lessons which appear to be fairly deducible from this divinely selected symbol.

I. *We may lawfully deduce from it that there is a connection of intelligence and sympathy between our world and distant portions of space.* "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (ver. 12).

We are all fully aware, of course, that there is a *physical* connection between our world and others. Influences of the most important character, and in which are bound up

* And further, what Daniel saw when the image was smitten by the stone—a great mountain filling the whole earth—may be identical with what Jacob saw.

the very existence of life upon our planet, are constantly passing and repassing, ascending and descending, between our world and the sun, and in a lesser degree between our world and the other members of the solar system, and even perhaps between us and the farthest orb the telescope can mount its way to. A connection of this kind every one freely admits. But that there is a connection of a higher order—a connection of intelligence and sympathy such as here pictured—is what very many repudiate, as unsupported by observation and fact, and a mere dream of the imagination. But it is a doctrine everywhere pervading the Bible, and one that has found an echo in the human consciousness since ever man had a being. Where the Bible has never been heard of, men have believed in this connection, and have been powerfully influenced by it; and neither reason nor science can produce any valid objection to it, but much on the other hand to strengthen us in this belief. We do not see these spiritual beings, who are passing and repassing between our world and other regions of the universe, but surely that is no valid ground on which to reject the Divine testimony that there are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation," the "messengers that do the pleasure" of heaven's King. What presumption to assume that our five senses give us the command of everything that exists, and that nothing can exist except what they can take cognisance of! May there not be, at any rate, a sixth sense at present lying dormant in us—a sense for apprehending the world of spirits—similar to what was awakened for a moment in Elijah's servant, when he beheld the mountain round about the prophet filled with chariots and horsemen of fire? Milton's words, I believe, are no mere poetic fancy, but express a sober truth, of which we shall one day be personally cognisant, when he says:—

"Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep;
All these, with ceaseless praise, God's works behold
Both night and day."

II. We are reminded, by what Jacob saw, *that all agencies and influences of every kind are under the immediate and personal superintendence of God Himself.*

In ver. 13 we read, "And behold the Lord stood above t"—above all the steps of the ladder, above all the ngels ascending and descending—God was "over all," nd taking a personal oversight of everything beneath.

The drift of modern infidelity is to admit the existence f an intelligent and personal God, but to remove Him to uch a distance, by the intervention of the secondary auses called the laws of nature, that, for all practical urposes, it comes to much the same thing as though here were no God at all. We are held, we are told, in he inexorable grasp of blind mechanical laws; and, lthough God be at the farthest link of the chain along hich the influences are transmitted to us, He takes no ersonal oversight of the creatures governed by these laws, ny more than our Queen sees or knows the multitudes hat are governed by *her* laws either in this country or in he cities of India or Australia.

Now we freely admit, and never sought to deny, that od governs by laws, and what good government can ever xist without laws? But does it therefore follow that God nust personally retire from the scene, and take no account f what is going on? Because I do a piece of work by neans of servants or workmen, can I take no personal versight of what they are doing? Away with this chilling nd irrational doctrine! Let the steps of the ladder, let he secondary causes between us and God, be as many s you choose to name or imagine—"Behold, the Lord

stands above it." "His eyes go to and fro upon the earth," taking a personal oversight of all that is done under the sun. Nature may, in many respects, be the mere machine which the atheist calls it, a machine as complicated us the one that Ezekiel saw, having "wheels within wheels;" but, as in what Ezekiel saw, there is a "spirit in the wheels;" they are "full of eyes:" the great God Himself is present. "He is not far from every one of us."

III. We are entitled, I think, to refer to Jacob's vision as *bearing testimony to the doctrine of a particular Providence.*

Jehovah, in this vision, intimates a very close connection between Himself and certain individuals of the human family. "I am the Lord God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac" (ver. 13). And (ver. 15) He says, "Behold, I am with *thee.*" And hence we may warrantably deduce one of the most prominent and comforting doctrines of Scripture, namely, that God not only presides personally over all the multitudinous and intricate processes of nature, ruling men in the mass, and providing for them in the aggregate, but that He singles out and guards with a special care every one, even the humblest of His creatures, and especially such as, like Jacob, are the heirs of the inheritance reserved for them that love Him. "The Lord hath set apart the godly man for Himself" (Ps. iv. 3). His eye is ever on His people. His ear is ever open to their cry. They are "the very apple of His eye," and, lest any hurt them, He watches them night and day. And each one of them may take to himself the comfortable word addressed to Jacob (ver. 15): "Behold, I am with *thee*, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest."

IV. The change which at this time passed upon Jacob,

through the medium of this vision, may be taken as *an example of the great change which we call regeneration and conversion.*

There is every probability that this vision formed the turning-point or crisis in Jacob's spiritual history; and we find him ever afterwards referring to it as a most memorable epoch. We can here perceive the traces of the great change, and may briefly note them.

1. His state of mind, previous to God's gracious manifestation, seems to have corresponded to that dejection and sorrow which characterize an awakened conscience. The gloom which was gathering, by the sun having set, was only a faint emblem of the gloom brooding over his spirit. His sins were before him, and he was painfully sensible that he need never have departed from home, had he not first departed from God. And this is the state of mind to which the Lord insists on bringing us before He will show us His salvation. He will have us sensible that we are sinners, guilty and perishing, and deserving to be visited in wrath rather than in mercy, saying, "O Lord, wert Thou strict to mark iniquity, O Lord, who should stand?" (Ps. cxxx.)

2. *Jacob's spirit was greatly solemnized.* He said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this the gate of heaven!" (ver. 16, 17.)

His soul became penetrated with a new idea. He had never before realized the presence of God as he did now. He had heard of Him by the hearing of the ear, but now his eyes had seen Him, and deep and thorough was the change produced on his spirit. From that night forward, life, in his eyes, had a purpose and a value that he had never before attached to it; and the thought, "Surely the

Lord is in this place," seems never again to have forsaken him. "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible."

Every converted soul has, in like manner, felt alone with God; and has been effectually stripped of all the heartless levity that used to characterize it by the conviction, "Thou God seest me." "Whither shall I go from Thy presence, or flee from Thy Spirit?" And the views of life, thereby engendered, are those which are so well expressed by one of our poets:—

"Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream;
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.
Life is real! life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
'Dust thou art, to dust returnest,'
Was not spoken of the soul."

3. It is clearly to be gathered here, that *Jacob believed God*, as did his father Abraham, and no doubt it was also counted to him for righteousness.

Some may imagine that the patriarch's language here implies doubt, and a disposition to make terms with God, rather than faith and implicit acquiescence in God's terms. He says (ver. 20), "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on." But the particle "*if*," in Scripture, has often a force the very contrary of implying doubt or hesitation. It often means "*since*," "*forasmuch as*." For example, "*If* sons, then heirs;" *i.e.*, *forasmuch as* we are sons, then are we also heirs. Again, "*If* there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love," and so forth; where the meaning is, not that there is any doubt about there being any consolation in Christ, but the very reverse—*since there is* consolation in Christ, and *since*

there is comfort of love, fulfil ye my joy" (Phil. ii. 1, 2). And so here the patriarch assumes that the promise which he had just heard from the mouth of God was true and faithful; and, since God had shown such condescension and mercy to him, notwithstanding all his evil desert, "then," said he, "shall the Lord be my God." "The Lord has given Himself to me, and here do I give myself to Him." Though the very word is not employed, the whole thing bears unmistakable marks of the actings of faith. We have here a specimen of a soul submitting to God's terms, and closing with His offered mercy. And we know that the great crisis in one's spiritual history is not safely passed until this be done. He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."

4. A fourth mark of Jacob having been born again is the strong instinctive impulse which he felt to enter into covenant with God. His setting up the stone on which his head had rested, for a pillar; his anointing it with oil; and his solemn vow to be the Lord's from thenceforth, are all of a sacramental nature, and belong to the actings of the new creature.

Our outward and visible methods of testifying our attachment to God and His salvation are, of course, different. Our baptism and the Lord's Supper are a different sort of pillar from what Jacob raised, but the object in view is identically the same—to testify our faith in God and in His promises, and to make known unto all men our engagement to be the Lord's. And the believer feels that it is for his safety, as well as for his edification, to commit himself to God in this public and formal manner. We are all the better for getting fairly committed to any good work we have taken in hand, and of having no way of retreat left to us, without dishonour and loss. In ancient warfare

we oftener than once read of invading armies burning the ships which brought them, and breaking down the bridges, so as to compel them to go on and make good their footing in the country. And by openly proclaiming ourselves, by sacramental acts, to be on the Lord's side, we, as it were, burn our ships, and cut down the bridges behind us, and are fairly committed to go forward in our warfare, and to take possession in the name of the Lord.

5. The fifth and last mark which I notice of Jacob's being now a new man, is his prompt and liberal resolve to sacrifice of his worldly substance to the Lord. "And this stone," he says (ver. 22), "which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

His vow was to the effect that, if spared, he would see that the worship of God be fitly celebrated on that spot, from day to day; and that a tenth part of all his substance should be dedicated to the maintenance of that worship. Where there is no disposition to present to the Lord thank-offerings out of all that He has given to us, I cannot see upon what ground it can be maintained that such a one has been born again of the Spirit of God. He that has been forgiven much will love much; and love and sacrifice were never known to be put asunder. Who can rightly feel the value of what Christ has done for him, and yet refuse to do anything for the glory of Christ's name, or for the good of those who are perishing for the lack of His knowledge? Should not the love of Christ constrain us, and should we not thus judge, "that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again"?

These, then, are a few evidences that the great change

implied in regeneration had now passed upon Jacob, and which we ought to apply as tests to ourselves in determining whether or no the same all-important change has passed upon us.

And, returning now to the general lessons deducible from the passage, I remark—

V. *That Jacob's forlorn situation that night may be taken as a good illustration of what God's people often appear to be in this world, while the reality is far different.*

Had any one passed Jacob that night, as he slept on his cold hard bed, and yet harder pillow, he might have thought himself safe in pronouncing the sleeper to be a very forlorn and pitiable object, and might have passed on, sighing over the desolation both of the man and of the place. But neither the place nor the man stood in any need of his pity. God was in that place, though the passer-by knew it not. Right over it heaven was open, and the ministers who do the pleasure of heaven's King were ascending and descending, and the soul of the sleeper was in warm and glorious contact with the spiritual world. Appearances in this instance were very deceptive, and presented a strange contrast to the glory revealed in the patriarch's soul. And has not this a parallel in many of God's people still? To the eye of sense they are more troubled than other men. Cast down, forsaken, persecuted, despised, neglected. But there is a glory revealed *in* them, which the eye of sense cannot perceive. They have a meat to eat that the world knows not of, a joy which no man taketh from them, a hope that maketh not ashamed, a joy unspeakable and full of glory. The spot where the cold and critical eye of the world falls upon them, their closet, their poor and humble dwelling, their pew in the sanctuary or their communion table, may have as little of the attractive

in it as had the spot on which Jacob lay. But to them it may be Bethel—a place of communion and fellowship with their Father in heaven, and an earnest foretaste of the rest laid up for them.

VI. The sixth and last use which I would make of this heavenly vision is the illustration which it affords of Christ's person and work.

It is not likely that Jacob himself was able to draw any such lesson from it, but we have evidence for concluding that there was more in it than Jacob knew of, or any suspected until Christ Himself directed attention to this aspect of the vision. There can be little doubt, I think, but that it was the ladder of this vision that Jesus had in view when He said to Nathanael (John i. 51), "Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." He makes that ladder to be a type of Himself, and what it shadowed forth has been so far realized in Him, and will be so fully "*hereafter*"—"Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

Here there is a wide and rich field for meditation opened up to us, had we time to expatiate upon it, but which we have not. I can point to but three particulars.

1. Like Jacob's ladder, Christ connects heaven and earth. Our sin separated us from heaven by a great and, for anything that we could do, an impassable gulf. Heaven, to all appearance, was hopelessly closed against us. We were cut off, doomed to perish by the wrath to come, and with no way of escaping from it, any more than have the angels who kept not their first estate. But God's eye pitied. God's hand was stretched forth to save. "Who will go?" He asked. "Here am I," said the eternal

Son, "send me." And the Son was sent in the fulness of the times. He was as a ladder let down from heaven to restore the suspended relation between God and His creature man.

2. Jacob's ladder may be taken as an illustration of the mystery of Christ's person as both God and man.

At one end, in His humanity, it rests upon the earth, while at the other, in His Divinity, it reacheth unto heaven. At one end you have the poor homeless wanderer with nowhere to lay His head but the stone of the wilderness, while at the other end there standeth, in all His glory and mystery, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob.

This is a great mystery—the great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh." But it behoved Him who should save us to the uttermost, to be constituted after this manner. Were He no more than human, we would have a ladder resting on the earth, and capable, perhaps, as in the case of Socrates and Plato, and many others, of conducting us a few steps above the grosser corruptions which are in the world. But when we had climbed to the highest round of it, heaven would be yet overhead, and an immeasurable distance between. And, on the other hand, were the Saviour Divine, but not human, the ladder would be seen suspended from heaven, as it were, dangling in mid air, and far beyond our reach. But we are not tantalized by either of these. Our Redeemer is very man and very God. He can stand between us and our offended Maker, and lay His hand upon both, so making peace; and, through His blood, we who are afar off are brought nigh.

3. As it was from the top of that ladder that Jehovah blessed Jacob, and as it was on that ladder that the angels ascended and descended in their ministry of love, so it

is only through Christ that God can bless men and send them tokens of His favour.

God is full of goodness; but in the case of the guilty and the outlawed, that goodness is guarded, like the gate of Eden, by a flaming sword that turns every way—the avenging sword of His justice. Some one must go first and encounter that flaming brand. And you know who went. The Lord Jesus gave His bare bosom to its point; and when it had drunk His heart's blood, its point was lowered, its flame was quenched, and through the rent veil of His flesh a way is opened by which we can come near to God.

A very few words now in conclusion.

The place where we are now assembled is called Bethel —the house of God; and, although invisible to mortal sight, we are warranted in saying that there is a ladder in our midst, stretching upwards to the eternal throne—the antitype and the substance of what Jacob saw, the Lord Jesus Christ, the new and living way. No man cometh unto the Father but by Him. He invites us all to lay hold upon Him, and to ascend by Him, so that there need not be one of us left to perish.

From earth there is a ladder, but we read of none from the pit of hell. On the contrary, Abraham said to the rich man who was lifting up his eyes in torments, "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from you to us cannot." Oh, then, ere the ladder be drawn up, ere the door of the ark be closed, ere your day of grace be done, "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn to the Lord."

And let God's own people, who are already upon the ladder, be encouraged to ascend still higher, leaving the

world farther and farther beneath them, and catching clearer views of the heavenly inheritance at every step, singing as they go, this spiritual song—

"Though like the wanderer,
The sun gone down,
Darkness be over me,
My rest a stone;
Yet in my dreams I'd be
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!

Here let the way appear
Steps unto heaven;
All that Thou send'st to me
In mercy given;
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!

Then with my waking thoughts
Bright with Thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs
Bethel I'll raise;
So by woes to be
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!" Amen.

II.

JOSEPH DISCOVERS HIMSELF TO HIS BRETHREN.

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood before him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him while Joseph made himself known to his brethren," etc.—GEN. xlv.

THE chapter we have now to examine takes us over the crisis of this "strange, eventful history." The mystery which has cast its spell over the reader, and held him in breathless attention, is now to be solved, and another example of God's wonderful providence held up to the delighted gaze of men and angels.

On a previous occasion that we read of, when Joseph stood before his brethren, although hard pressed to maintain his incognito, and although requiring to hasten to his chamber to give vent to his feelings in private, he yet managed to "refrain himself," as is expressly stated (xliii. 31). But we come to a point now where it is as expressly stated that "Joseph could not refrain himself;" and the immediate cause of this utter breakdown in his deportment was the touching appeal of Judah, contained in the previous chapter, and which might well have moved what the poet calls "a brassy bosom and a rough heart of flint," not to speak of such a tender and loving soul as Joseph's.

It was probably, I think, Joseph's intention to protract the mystery a little longer. What he was manifestly

working for was to get Benjamin into his possession, and to let the others go home; expecting, very likely, that this would lead to his father himself coming down so as to negotiate the release of his child; and with this view he had fallen on the stratagem of secreting the "divining cup," as it was called by the Egyptians, in Benjamin's sack. But he had not fully considered what would be the effect upon his father of the brethren going home without Benjamin; and when this was set before him, in the affecting words of Judah, he could no longer think of carrying out his expressed design. Imagine how tender a chord would be struck in Joseph's bosom as Judah said to him, "Now therefore, when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us, seeing that *his* life is bound up in the lad's life, it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die; and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave" (xliv. 30, 31). The bare thought that he might prove his father's death, if he sent them home without Benjamin, at once determined him to dismiss that project; and such was the rush of tender thoughts produced in his mind by Judah's allusions to the past—to his father, to himself, and to Benjamin—that he was no longer master of himself. The supreme moment had arrived, Joseph must reveal himself.

But it was not altogether *feeling* that got the better of Joseph. A calmer and more rational element was not without its influence upon him, as is not obscurely manifested in what he said to the brethren, after he had told them who he was. Their conduct, all through this last and worst perplexity that he had brought upon them, clearly showed that there was no longer any necessity for carrying the concealment further; *his object was gained.* His brethren had furnished the most gratifying evidence that

they were no longer the men they had been. They were once all envy and hatred, the incarnations of the cruelest and most unmitigated selfishness, and Joseph's object all along, in acting the part he did, was to bring their sin to their remembrance, to humble them on account of it, to make them feel that their sin had found them out, and to search them for the evidences of true repentance and reformation of character; and Joseph's endeavours, in these respects, were crowned with the most gratifying success. He had heard them making the bitter confession one to another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother," and "therefore has this distress come upon us;" "behold, also, his blood is required." They were afraid, and said one to another, "What is this that God hath done unto us?" "God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants." And he could also perceive the spirit and the works which are meet for repentance. His superior attentions to Benjamin, done on purpose to test them, had elicited in them no appearance of envy; and now, when they were asked to go home unharmed, and to leave Benjamin to his fate, they refused to do so, and actually offered themselves to be slaves, along with him, rather than leave him, or again witness the anguish of their father. How different from the men who had exclaimed, "Behold, this dreamer cometh: we shall see what will become of his dreams"! All the ends of probation and discipline had been accomplished, and Joseph will inflict on them no wanton nor needless pangs, and so he hastens to reveal himself as their long-lost brother and benefactor.

And may we not pause here, my friends, to recognize in Joseph another figure of "Him who was to come," of Him who is "exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins"?

There is a point up to which Jesus may be said to "refrain Himself," and to make Himself strange to His brethren, and that point is, as in the case of Joseph's brethren, until they be humbled and made thoroughly contrite. He leads them about for this very purpose, creating perplexing situations for them; now elevating them with hope, and anon pushing them to the very brink of despair, making them sing alternately of mercy and of judgment; and at last, when fairly at their wits' end to understand the Lord's dealing with them, and brought apparently to the last pass of misery, where they must inevitably perish for ever, the mask falls; Jesus can no longer refrain Himself; their hearts are broken. They are truly penitent, and He hastens to revive the spirit of the humble, and revive the heart of the contrite ones, saying to them, "I am Jesus." "Fear not; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified." "Behold my hands and my side." "Peace be unto you."

And we may be further reminded here, that this blessed discovery, in the case of every anxious and heavy-laden soul, may be greatly expedited by persevering and earnest prayer. As already hinted, the crisis in the case before us came sooner than Joseph either expected or intended; and it was Judah's earnest and affecting pleading that brought it on. Joseph felt as if he had no power to withstand such an appeal as was made to him, and that he must at once surrender. Luther, remarking on that appeal, says, "I would give very much to be able to pray to our Lord God as well as Judah prays to Joseph here; for it is a perfect specimen of prayer, the true feeling that there ought to be in prayer." And, dear friends, how far have we tested the power of direct and impassionate appeal upon our Joseph—our Brother born for adversity? *He cannot*, with all reverence be it said, *resist it*. It

overpowers Him, as if He were a disabled wrestler. "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted," thou whose guilty conscience is picturing the Saviour to thee as one hard to be entreated, one seeking to meet out to thee the sternest award of justice, take Judah's method with Him. Cry to Him, plead with Him, wrestle with Him, and thou wilt see what a change will pass upon Him. The guise of strangeness and severity, assumed for thy profit, will be flung away, and, as in the case of the Syro-Phœnician woman, who for a time was treated by Him as a dog, He will turn upon thee a countenance beaming with love and sympathy, and will say to thee, "O sinner, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

As to the supreme moment of interest, when Joseph made himself known to his brethren, there is no use my trying to depict it to you if your own imaginations have not already fully realized it from the simple words of the narrative. The scene is too tender and sacred for any outsiders to intermeddle with it. Joseph cried, "Cause every man to go out from me." And let us respect that cry, as well as the Egyptians. We have no business there. When members of a family weep together over some private grief or joy, let the great noisy world stand aloof, and guard their privacy as sacred. And yet I think there is no harm in propounding what a sublime study it would be for the master painters (a study which has sometimes been attempted by inferior hands, but which yet awaits the manipulation of a master), that which is conjured up by the words of that third verse, "*And Joseph said unto his brethren,* I AM JOSEPH; *doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him, for they were troubled at his presence.*"

But though declining to deal with the actual scene, we

may note the fact that a good many students of prophecy, and I confess to being one of them, cannot divest themselves of the idea that, since the *minor* incidents of Joseph's life are so eminently typical of Christ, this incident, of such thrilling moment, cannot be without its significance in a typical and prophetical point of view; and that this signification is to be sought for *in the future.*

Jesus of Nazareth, who has been so long lost to His brethren according to the flesh, shall yet be found of them, and recognized by them. They despised and hated Him for His assumptions and predictions; and "for envy they delivered Him" into the hands of the Gentiles, as they did Joseph, selling Him for certain pieces of silver. And to this hour they firmly believe, as a people, that the last of Jesus of Nazareth was witnessed on the cross of Calvary. They have no belief that He has been exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to the right hand of the Majesty on high, as Joseph was exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh. But there is a day coming (and we believe that it is now not very far distant) when they will be no longer able to gainsay or resist it. A "great tribulation" is coming on all the earth, infinitely more trying than what came upon Egypt and the adjoining lands; and in the crisis of that tribulation a Deliverer will come, and the Jews, in conjunction with other peoples, will hail Him as the world's Saviour—*the promised Messiah.* But oh, the surprise, the confusion, the horror of the Jews, to find that the heavenly Deliverer is none other than the Son of Mary—the rejected and crucified Jesus of Nazareth! They will look upon Him whom they have pierced, and will be troubled at His presence when they see the wounds in His hands and in His side. "They shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for an only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In

that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon" (Zech. xii. 10, 11). And God speed that day when this word shall be fulfilled: "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen" (Rev. i. 7).

Besides the fact of Joseph's discovery of himself to his brethren, there are three outstanding points in the chapter before us, which may be selected for a little separate treatment. There is—

I. The generous and forgiving spirit of Joseph, as manifested in all he said and did to his brethren, as narrated from the fourth to the fifteenth verses.

II. We have the princely conduct of Pharaoh, and the munificent equipment with which he supplied the brethren, in order to bring their father and their families into Egypt. This includes the verses from the sixteenth to the twenty-fourth. And—

III. We have the effect of all these wondrous tidings upon the aged patriarch, as described from the twenty-fifth verse to the end of the chapter.

Let us glance for a little at each of these in order.

I. In the FIRST place, then, from the fourth to the fifteenth verses, there is a great deal to be gathered in evidence of the generous and forgiving spirit by which Joseph was so eminently characterized.

We cannot enter minutely into all that he addressed to his brethren on this occasion, but a detailed examination of it would show that it was, in every way, worthy of his exalted character, as full of dignity as of melting tenderness, and wearing upon it the stamp of truth and nature.

Being now fully convinced of the genuineness of his brethren's repentance, he touches on their past sin in the slightest and most delicate manner possible. Refer to it, in some shape, he must, were it only to convince them that he really is Joseph, and not some one trying to play off some heartless trick upon them. He is, however, the furthest possible from upbraiding them with their sin, although he says, "I am Joseph, *your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.*" In fact, he rather tries to extenuate and excuse it. He invites them to take the high view of the matter that he did himself; namely, that God had overruled it for the good of all concerned, and that, in one aspect of it at least, it was more God's doing than theirs. "Now, therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life;" "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God." This, of course, was all very kind in Joseph, and no doubt quite true as well, yet no thanks to those brethren that any good had come of it. They meant only evil, and for the good that came of it the thanks were due to the God who bringeth good out of evil, and maketh the very wrath of man to praise Him. But Joseph was intent on calming and comforting his affrighted brethren, and this was the method which most readily suggested itself. Had they not been truly penitent, it might have been perhaps unwise and dangerous to have presented this view of the matter to them. Ungodly men like nothing better than to be able to shift the blame of their misdeeds from themselves to God. "It was not we that did it, but our temperament, our natural bias and constitution, our phrenological developments, our circumstances, and such like; and for these our Maker is responsible, and not we." Or, as one of your own poets also saith,—

"Thou know'st that Thou hast formed me
With passions wild and strong;
And listening to their witching voice
Hath often led me wrong."

But the truly penitent, like Joseph's brethren, can bear to be reminded that "God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass," without the risk of their overlooking their own guilt and evil desert in connection with their sins, or of falling into the horrid impiety of making God the author of them, and of denying their own moral responsibility. And when we have reason to believe that no bad use will be made of it, we may strive to soothe the penitent's agitated mind, in every way that we lawfully can. If *God* has begun to heal where He has torn, why should we seek to prolong the pain? Let us bring up to view every extenuating circumstance, and point to every phase of good which God has brought out of the evil, even as the Apostles themselves did in regard to the greatest crime ever perpetrated in this world: "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers" (Acts iii. 17); but at the same time let the principal balm which we bring for the wounded spirit be the precious blood of Christ; for what avail all ameliorating views of sin which can be taken, while the central fact of guilt remains? These will heal the hurt of the daughter of my people but slightly. The only thorough and abiding comfort is in the fact that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin."

But yet, as a general rule, in dealing with our fellow-men, the spirit here manifested by Joseph, of searching out and giving prominence to everything which can be said in extenuation of others' faults and failings, is greatly more commendable than that dark and censorious spirit which delights to put the blackest construction upon everything, and which believes in nothing but evil. Let us school

ourselves in putting the best face upon the faults and failings of all around us, until it become our habit so to do; for in this way will we occupy all the better vantage ground for reproving their faults, and contributing to their reformation. And if we be ofttimes wrong in thinking too favourably of others, what matters it? It is not we who are to judge the world; they have one who judgeth them, even God. And let us judge nothing before the time.

How deeply had Joseph been wronged by these men! How many were the hardships and sufferings he had endured on their account through many years! and yet now, when he has them in his power, and might smite them with a terrible retribution, how frankly, how generously does he forgive it all! and, without a similar spirit upon our part, how can we hope that we have been renewed in the image of Christ? or how dare we to ask forgiveness for ourselves? "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses."

And here once more we behold a better than Joseph; One who pardons with overflowing love; One who suffered more at the hands of sinners than ever Joseph did; yea, One who suffered under the hand of God as well, for He bore our sins in His own body upon the tree, and was made a curse for us; but yet the worst of sinners are welcome to His mercy and forgiveness. Joseph, in his exaltation, was the means of first working repentance in his brethren in the manner we have seen; and then follows it up, as we see now, by generously forgiving them. And in like manner has Jesus been "exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins."

II. Let us glance now, *secondly*, at the princely conduct

of Pharaoh when he heard that Joseph's brethren were with him. The account of this extends from the 16th to the 24th verses.

All through this history, the character of Pharaoh stands forth to much advantage, presenting a marked contrast to that other Pharaoh who came after him, and "who knew not Joseph;" and holding up a bright example of wisdom and generosity to the monarchs of every time. Had this monarch been actuated by the mean and petty jealousies which so often disfigure even the loftiest in worldly rank, he would have taken a very different course from what he did. He would have said to himself, "I shall be eaten up with this man's relatives; he has taken a great deal upon him, and much more than he should have done, in promising them a settlement in my country. These foreigners must be watched, else they may turn out to be dangerous, and my crown and authority may be brought into jeopardy. I must raise every impediment I can think of to prevent their coming here; and if they do come, I must keep them down with a high hand." It was thus, we know, that one of Pharaoh's successors reasoned; but such mean and despicable thoughts were far away from this noble-minded monarch. It gave him unbounded pleasure to have it in his power to show kindness to Joseph's kindred, and he insisted on much more being done than what even Joseph himself proposed. And his courtiers, who very likely had misgivings about the kindness shown to these strangers, yet saw that their master was too much in earnest for them to raise any objections, and accordingly they *affected*, at least, to be pleased with it too. "And it pleased Pharaoh *well, and his servants.*" The *well* applies to Pharaoh, but not to his servants. They *said* that they were pleased, or made some sign that they were, but we are left to infer that they were not much more than half pleased. What

an exquisite touch of human nature! We seem as if we could shake hands with those old Egyptians across the gulf of thirty-six centuries, and not as the dried and swathed mummies of our museums, but as living creatures, such as we have experience of every day:—

> "Revisiting the glimpses of the moon,
> Not like thin ghosts, or disembodied creatures,
> But with their bones and flesh, and limbs and features."
>
> *Horace Smith.*

Pharaoh's appointments for the service to be done were on the most liberal scale. "And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Say unto thy brethren, This do ye: lade your beasts, and go, get you unto the land of Canaan; and take your father and your households, and come unto me; and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land. Now thou art commanded, this do ye; take you waggons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. Also regard not your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours."

The only word of Pharaoh that we are tempted to dwell upon is that last word, "*Regard not your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours;*" and that word we are inclined to look at from a spiritual point of view. Great and good as Pharaoh was, a greater and better than he invites us to a better inheritance than Goshen, and to a greater treasure than all the riches of Egypt. And He is saying to us, "*Regard not your stuff*,—sit loose to all your earthly possessions; count them but dung—they are only stuff"—"such stuff as dreams are made of." The good of all the land is before you. And such good "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive of it." And if Jacob's sons, resting on the promise of Pharaoh, could leave all their "stuff"

behind them, either making a bonfire of it, or distributing it among their neighbours, does the promise of our God impart to us no courage to look upon all present possessions as a fashion which is passing away, and to set our affections upon that world to come, where all is satisfying and eternal?

And, perhaps, the word with which Joseph dismissed his brethren is also worthy of a little comment. "He said unto them," as we read in the twenty-fourth verse, "*See that ye fall not out by the way.*" Joseph was well aware what materials for disagreement existed among them. They were not all equally guilty in the matter of selling him into Egypt. Reuben deterred them from shedding his blood on the spot, and suggested the casting of him into the pit. Judah proposed the selling of him to the Ishmaelites; and all of them, in ways not recorded, may have shown themselves more or less forward in getting rid of their brother. And now, as they journeyed homewards, and recalled the whole circumstances, they might discover abundant material for mutual recrimination, saying, "You said this, and you did that," until all their repentances might be undone, and themselves hurried into some new exhibition of the old man and his hateful lusts and passions. And accordingly there was some need for the warning, "See that ye fall not out by the way." As Joseph had freely forgiven them all alike, whatever was the amount of each one's complicity in the original crime, so would he have them to forgive one another, and to love one another *as he had loved them.* He was acting in the spirit of Him who said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John xiii. 34).

And have not we, my friends, has not the Church of God in every age, had some need of this admonition, "See

that ye fall not out by the way"? All of us who have been with Jesus, as these men were with Joseph, and have been forgiven and accepted by Him, profess to be journeying homewards to our Father's house. But, alas! how many have been the fallings out, the bickerings, the dissensions by the way? And will they never be done? Will the infidel and the heathen be always able to point the slow and scornful finger at the dissensions among the professed followers of Christ? Will Christ's own prayer be always a nullity—"That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me"? (John xvii. 21.) There are yearnings abroad at the present time after a closer unity among the followers of Christ in our own and other lands, such as have not been known for many ages; and let us not wantonly discourage these yearnings, but help them forward as we have opportunity, and pray for their success. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" A German poet (Tersteegen), with an eye to the words before us, has said in language, of which the following translation may convey the import :—

"Come, let us forward go,
Courageous hand in hand;
And cheer each other's hearts,
While in this foreign land:
Let us like children be,
Nor by the way fall out;
Like brothers, angel hosts,
Ye compass us about!

Let strong ones bear him up,
Should e'er a weak one fall.
Each other's burdens bear,
Sow love and peace—let all

Come, form a closer band.
Let each the least one be;
Each on our pilgrim way
Excel in purity!

'Tis not for very long;
Wait—soon the time will come.
'Tis not for very long,
And we shall be at home.
Home in our Father's house,
With all the faithful blest,
How well 'twill be with us
In everlasting rest!"

III. In the *third* and last place, let us glance at the effect of all these strange tidings on the aged patriarch, and as it stands narrated from the twenty-fifth verse to the end of the chapter.

"They went up," we read, "and came into the land of Canaan, unto Jacob their father." But was there no new trial in this? Was their sin not yet done finding them out? or, rather, was not this, perhaps, the painfullest trial of all? For must they not now disclose and undo the past, confess all their dark deed of villainy, and, looking their loving father in the face, discover the long lie by which they had made his age miserable? But *it must be done*, and oh, what humiliation! And, my friends, even though we be penitent and forgiven on account of our past sins, we know not the depths of humiliation and anguish we may yet be forced to wade through in making reparation—in unsaying and undoing the past. Let us, therefore, be careful to create no such necessity. At first the tidings of Joseph being alive quite stunned and bewildered the old man. "Jacob's heart fainted; for he believed them not." He was now one hundred and thirty years of age, and he may have become accustomed to his mind being occa-

sionally in a kind of maze, when all things past and present seemed jumbled together in strange confusion. And, perhaps, he imagined that this must be one of his "weak moments," one of his fits of dotage, when his wavering faculties called up bright visions of the dear boy long since perished, and as if he were yet alive, but only to elude and mock him. "He did not believe them." But by-and-by his scattered wits began to collect and settle. "There must," he would say to himself, "be more in this than a dream or hallucination; for are they not all there? and do they not all persist in repeating the same thing? and does not Benjamin, in whom my life is bound up, hold to it too? and above all, are not these the Egyptian waggons they speak of? And thus, gradually and bit by bit, as it were, the glad tidings penetrated the old man's mind, and rekindled a light there that was now burning low in its socket. "The spirit of Jacob their father revived." The joyful tidings were at length felt to be a reality; and seizing his pilgrim staff, he is young again, and as resolute to go as when the Lord said to him, "Arise, get thee out of the land of Haran." "Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die."

You will observe the abrupt transition here from the name "Jacob" to that of "Israel." "*Jacob's* heart fainted," "*Israel* said, It is enough." And this transition is not made without a purpose, and that purpose seems in no way obscure. Jacob is the *unaided* man—*the man* who had long rested on his own fleshly wisdom and strength—and it is that man's heart which faints, and will not believe. But "Israel" is God's prince—the man whose faith had overcome God Himself; and it is as "Israel" that he says "It is enough," and rises to the requirements of this emergency. It is another draft made upon his faith, and

he honours it. It is the Lord wrestling with him once again, and he prevails. *Jacob's* heart fainted, for he did not believe them. But *Israel* said, "Joseph my son is yet alive." The worm Jacob once more thrashes the mountains, and beats them to powder.

"He *fainted*, for he *believed not*." And what else can be coupled with unbelief but fainting? "I had fainted," says David, "unless I had believed." And why are we so fearful, so agitated and downcast, so slow of heart to take in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of peace? It is because of our *no* faith, or our *little* faith.

Tidings, for example, have come to us that He, whom Joseph typified, is yet alive—crucified and buried, but yet alive—risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven. And does our heart faint at these tidings, repelling it as all too good to be true? Or can we rise to the height of Israel, and say, "*It is enough! Jesus is yet alive*"? These witnesses, these evangelists and apostles, who have seen the risen Lord, are true and faithful. And, perhaps, if our eyes were opened like those of Elijah's servant, we might see the "*waggons*" too—the chariots and horsemen of fire sent to transport us to the heavenly country. But whether or no, It is enough! Jesus is yet alive, and I will go and see Him, *but not before I die*. Perhaps He may come to me before I die, for we shall not all die. Some will be alive and remain at the coming of the Lord, and these shall not taste of death. But whether living or dying, we are the Lord's, and shall be with Him, if so be that we are His faithful followers now. We shall see Him as He is. "As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness" (Ps. xvii. 15). Amen.

III.

THE WIDOW OF NAIN'S SON.

"And it came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people," etc.—LUKE vii. 11—17.

"MY meat," said Christ, "is to do the will of Him that sent me;" and how fully that was the ruling passion of His life is well illustrated by this portion of Scripture history. Labour follows on labour in the closest succession, and yet no murmur nor complaint of weariness escapes the lips of Christ. We read in verse 12 of the previous chapter, that our Lord had spent all night in prayer, on a lonely hill-side, as He not unfrequently did. In the morning He set apart His twelve Apostles, and then came down with them to the plain, where a great multitude of people was assembled; and there He preached to them at great length, and wrought many miracles of healing. And no sooner had He finished that discourse, than He went to Capernaum, where He was ready, at the call of the centurion, to heal his servant; and then, as we read in the verses now before us, "It came to pass, *the day after*, that He went into a city called Nain," a town some twelve miles from Capernaum, to continue His gracious work there. And this is but a sample only of His ordinary labours. How true that it was His meat and drink! and what a rebuke to us, who so soon and so easily grow faint and

weary in any department of the Lord's work that we take in hand! and what a stimulus to us to work while it is day!

It was now evening when Christ and His companions arrived at the gate of Nain. This we conclude from the fact of their meeting a funeral; for there was a custom and law among the Jews, that funerals should take place at sunset; and this, besides being a good sanitary precaution in not exposing dead bodies to the intense heat of an eastern sun, had also something in it very appropriate and congenial to this last solemn office which we need at the hands of our fellows. "The gaudy, babbling, and remorseful day," as the poet calls it, is too full of glare, and din, and bustle; and though the funeral procession, passing through the crowd, so full of life and boisterous activity, may read to them the text, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," it is yet more instructive than pleasing. The contrast is too harsh and startling. All things seem most in sympathy when clad in the sober livery of the evening; when man, and beast, and earth, and air, seem grave and reverential spectators. The grave, these mourners believed, was the place where the "weary are at rest," and they laid their burden in it when nature too was weary and disposed to rest. And, to the reflective among them, the fact of nature rising fresh and vigorous again on the morrow, might remind them that there is a morrow also for the unconscious sleeper, when death shall be swallowed up in victory.

As the shades of evening then were setting in, the company from Capernaum drew nigh to Nain. If we were disposed to indulge the imagination, there is here an exquisite picture for the painter's art. The word *Nain* signifies "beautiful," or "picturesque," and was, no doubt, descriptive of the site and neighbourhood of the village. Nestling at the foot of the tall and spiral-like Tabor, among

ancient oaks, and olives, and sycamores, and clustering vines, and with the river Kishon, "that ancient river," meandering through a plain which, for its beauty and fertility, is in Scripture described as "the garden of the Lord," the prospect must have been beautiful in the extreme, as it lay in the soft warm light of an eastern evening. And who shall say that Christ had no eye to admire it? He who spoke so rapturously of the "lilies of the field" could not fail to admire that landscape, the glorious workmanship of His own hands; or if associations could heighten the interest of the scene before them, as they never fail to do, there were abundance of them. Higher up the mountain than Nain was Endor, where the infatuated Saul sought the enchantress in his trouble. It was on that mountain also that the "stars in their courses fought against Sisera;" there did Elijah confound the prophets of Baal; and there did Christ purpose to be transfigured before His Apostles.

But, whatever may have been their thoughts and conversation, on nearing the place a new object engages them: "And when He came night to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out."

Among the Jews, all burial grounds were strictly commanded to be without the city; and in this we have been too tardy in taking a lesson from them. But, while this subserved important sanitary ends, the principal reason for the command arose out of the ceremonial defilement which was connected with the presence of the dead. A burial ground within a city would have rendered the whole city ceremonially unclean—unfit to approach the temple of God. And from the manner in which this miracle was performed, we have here also a reference to the Jewish mode of burial. There was no coffin; the body was simply dressed in grave-clothes, and borne to the sepulchre upon a bier, with a pall thrown over it. It was thus, you remem-

ber, that Joseph of Arimathea prepared Christ's own body for the tomb: "He wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own tomb."

A dead man was being carried forth. Yes! however much we may love our friends, they must be "carried forth." "Sarah," we read, "was a very fair woman to look upon," and dearly did Abraham love her, yet he must solicit the sons of Heth for a place to bury his dead "out of his sight." Let none be proud of, nor set too much value on, fair looks. The lapse of years, and, at last, the pale ensign of death, and the maw of the worm, will make fearful havoc on these evanescent charms. The beauty which age only heightens, and which neither death nor worm can touch, is the "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," "the beauty of holiness."

But let us not forget our narrative. The Evangelist tells us something of this dead man. He does it in few words; but, for pathos and significancy, you will in vain search all human writings for their parallel. This language is what grammarians would call a climax. The sorrow of the chief mourner is described in an accumulating degree, one step rising above the other, till we are left with a touching picture of the most abject desolation. Just read the words, "Behold, there was a dead man carried out." That of itself was affecting. He was, as we learn from Christ's words to him, a "young man." It is, at all times, affecting to see the powers of manhood untimely laid low, and all its bright prospects expire in darkness. But here there was a higher grief still. What adds the Evangelist? "*The only son of his mother.*" The death of an only son is spoken of, in Scripture, as the greatest grief to which humanity can be subjected. "They shall mourn as one that mourneth for an only son." But, to complete the picture of this poor woman's misery, the Evangelist still

further adds, "The only son of his mother, *and she was a widow.*" Her last prop was gone. She was now left in the world like the bare and withered trunk of a tree, left standing on a desolate heath, with all its fair branches lopped away.

Her case had evidently excited widespread sympathy. She would see the last of her son; and, according to Eastern custom, went to the funeral, "and much people of the city was with her." They, no doubt, said and did what they could to comfort her, as is all our duty in similar circumstances. But poor, at the best, are all the comforts which man can minister to the wounded spirit. But there was one at hand whose delight it was to "bind up the broken heart," and who had the power as well as the will. "And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her." Approaching the weeping mother, Christ said, in tenderest accents, "Weep not." And then came the marvellous exercise of His miraculous power: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother." How sudden the transition from the deepest woe to the most thrilling gladness! And it is often with Christ's people as with this poor woman. The hour of their extremity is His opportunity. When all looks blackest and most hopeless is often the moment He chooses for His most gracious interpositions. And if we be depending upon Him as our only help in time of trouble, He will not permit the trouble to sink us in despair. He will, as in the hard case of the woman before us, take compassion upon us, and say unto us, "Weep not."

Having thus briefly sketched the more interesting features of the narrative, let us now see what doctrines and lessons it is fitted to teach us. It brings the Saviour before us in

three important characters: first, as the Divine Prophet of the Church; second, as the merciful High Priest; and third, as the Prince of Life.

I. *Christ is the Divine Prophet of the Church.* The thought that He was a Prophet was what first and most naturally suggested itself to the people of Nain. "They glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us; and that God hath visited His people." And the same conclusion, you remember, was what forced itself on the mind of Nicodemus, in connection with our Lord's miracles. He said (John iii. 2), "We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him." And it was solely to work this conviction in men's minds, that our Lord wrought miracles at all. He came professing to be "that Prophet that should come into the world," the Messiah promised to the fathers, the "*sent*" of God; and men were entitled to require something more of Him than His own word, before receiving Him in that high character. And He always did give them more than His word. He showed Himself possessed of the mighty power of God, and demanded a reception for, and submission to, His teachings, on the ground that the seal of the Almighty was appended to all He taught. "Believe Me," He said, "for the very works' sake." And again, "The works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me that the Father hath sent Me."

But had the people, on the occasion before us, attentively considered Christ's manner of working this miracle, they would have acknowledged Him to be more than a *great* Prophet, even a *Divine* Prophet, a Person possessing all the attributes of Divinity. And many of them, it is to be

hoped, came, upon further reflection, to be persuaded of this.

Others raised the dead besides Christ, but His manner of doing it differed entirely from theirs. Elijah restored to life the widow of Zarephath's son, but he did it, not in his own name, nor by his own authority. We read that he "cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray Thee, let this child's soul come into him again." And so when Elisha raised the Shunammite's son, "he went in and prayed unto the Lord." When Peter restored Tabitha to life, it was by prayer, and by the name of Jesus. But how different is the case before us! Jesus asks help from none; but, in His own name, and by His own authority, He said, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise;" from which the conclusion is irresistible, that Christ was not merely an instrument or channel of Divine power, like Elijah or Peter, but was the source and home of it, a Divine Person in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

The witnesses of this miracle glorified God that, in the person of this great Prophet, He had visited His people. And what good cause have we also to glorify God that the mission of that Prophet was not confined to the house of Israel, but included sinners of the Gentiles too! God hath visited us, His Prophet has spoken to us, and shown the path of life to us; and if we heed Him not, and obey Him not, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for us.

II. We have the Saviour set before us, in this incident, as *the merciful High Priest.* When He saw the desolate and weeping widow, "He had compassion on her." The bare sight of her sank into Jesus' heart, and excited the deepest compassion in Him. And often, throughout the Gospels, do we read of His being similarly affected.

When the miserable leper came beseeching Him, we read that Jesus, "moved with compassion, put forth His hand and touched him" (Mark i. 41). When He looked on the multitudes scattered as sheep having no shepherd, He was "moved with compassion" (Matt. ix. 36). And how deep were His compassions as He beheld apostate Jerusalem, and wept over it! "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not" (Luke xiii. 34).

In the case before us, our Lord's compassion is all the more remarkable that no means were taken to awaken it. It was entirely spontaneous. No one asked His help, or expected it. The leper besought Christ to have compassion, and so did the centurion that we read of in the opening verses of this chapter, on behalf of his servant But in this case it was the bare spectacle of human sorrow and desolation which stirred His heart.

And let us not forget that His great interposition on our behalf was strictly of this nature. He came to save us, but we never besought Him to come. He was found of them that sought Him not, and has to press His gracious offices upon our reluctant and rebellious wills. He had compassion upon us. He passed by and saw us lying polluted in our own blood, and, moved with compassion, He came to heal and wash us.

And how this insight into the heart of Jesus should dispose us to trust Him, and to come to Him with all our griefs, and anxieties, and difficulties! "We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities." No parent's heart is stirred so deeply at the sight of his suffering child, as the heart of Christ is at the bare sight of His people's griefs. "Weep not," is the word

that He would like to speak to every one of them, and would speak, were it not that weeping for a time may do them more good than anything else, and prepare them for a more exquisite joy than they could otherwise taste. But let us never doubt we have His sympathies, and that He regards us with compassion, and will yet say to us, "Weep not," and furnish good cause for our mourning being turned into joy.

> "Though now ascended up on high,
> He bends on earth a brother's eye;
> Partaker of the human name,
> He knows the frailty of our frame."

III. And lastly. This incident presents our Saviour to us as *the Prince of Life*. Death, the "inexorable" and the "omnipotent," as the heathen called it, had to give way to Christ. He had the keys of Hades and of death.

Three times our Saviour exercised His Divine power upon the dead, and the cases admit of an arrangement which seems intended to show that Christ could bring to life again, no matter how wide might appear the gulf between the body and the departed spirit. The daughter of Jairus had just breathed her last, and He stayed the departed spirit in its flight, and brought it back again. The widow's son had been dead some time, and ready to be laid in the grave; but the command, "Arise," was as effectual in his case as in the other. Lazarus had been in the tomb four days, and putrefaction was in progress; but he, too, heard and obeyed the summons, "Lazarus, come forth." In these typical cases we have the sure pledge and guarantee that, when that hour comes of which Christ spoke, when they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, there will be no failure to respond. Through all the realms of the dead the voice of the Prince

of Life will re-echo, and the last enemy, death himself, shall be destroyed.

We read in this passage, that when Jesus had raised the young man, "*He delivered him to his mother.*" And I doubt not that we are to read, in that act, the pleasure that Christ Himself felt in drying up her tears, and turning her sorrow into gladness. When He raised the daughter of Jarius, He took the child's father and mother with Him, that He might Himself enjoy the pleasure of giving them back their child, and of witnessing their joy. And we may be well assured that Jesus Himself was not untouched by the joy of the two sisters when their brother was restored to them. He had wept with them when they wept, and He would rejoice with them when they rejoiced.

And is it too much to say that Christ is looking forward to the Resurrection as a time of infinite joy and pleasure for Himself, as well as for His people? How many little daughters and sons will He then deliver to their mothers, and brothers, and sisters! how many wives to husbands, and friends to friends! And none will be more joyful, amid the universal greetings, than the compassionate Saviour Himself, who by His word shall have thus reversed all sorrow, and wiped away all tears, and removed all occasion for ever again saying, "Weep not."

That sublime exercise of His prerogative as the Prince of Life is, however, yet in the future. But He is showing Himself to be the Prince of Life *now*. We are *twice* dead, and twice require to hear the quickening voice of the Son of God; and He has taught us inseparably to unite the two when He says, "The hour cometh, *and now is*, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live" (John v. 25). And if we do not hear the voice of the Son of God *now*, and awake from the death of sin to newness of life, His voice, at the

coming hour, will be the voice of doom—"*Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment!*"

Let us seek now, then, to know the Prince of Life. We are naturally dead, insensate, lost to the glory of God and our own best interests. But in Him is life; and He quickeneth whom He will. And no matter how far gone in spiritual death we are, He can recall us to repentance and to life. Some of you may be following, with your prayers, some relative, or friend, or neighbour, as if to his or her very burial, disconsolate and weeping as you go, like this widowed mother. But be not discouraged. Doubt not the willingness and power of Jesus to deal with it. When you least look for it, perhaps, He will touch the bier, and say, "Young man, young woman, arise!" And He will deliver the risen one to you, a new creature, created of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Hazell, Watson, and Viney, Printers, London and Aylesbury.